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THE SALJUQ  
AND MONGOL PERIODS

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## CHAPTER 5

# THE ISMĀ'ĪLĪ STATE

### ISMĀ'ĪLĪ RULERS OF ALAMŪT

#### *Dā'īs of Dailam*

- 483/1090–518/1124: *Ḥasan-i Sabbāḥ* (34 years)  
 483/1090 Alamūt occupied  
 485/1092 Death of Nizām al-Mulk and Malik-Shāh  
 487/1094 Death of al-Mustanṣir; Nizārī schism  
 494/1100 Aḥmad-i 'Aṭṭāsh in Shāhdiz  
 498/1104 Death of Berk-Yaruq; Muḥammad Tapar in power  
 500/1107 Fall of Shāhdiz  
 511/1118 Death of Muḥammad Tapar; Siege of Alamūt lifted  
 518/1124–532/1138: *Buzurg-Ummīd* (14 years)  
 520/1126 Maimūn-Diz built  
 529/1135 Assassination of al-Mustarshid  
 532/1138–557/1162: *Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd* (24 years)  
 532/1138 Assassination of al-Rāshid

#### *Imāms of the Qiyāma*

- 557/1162–561/1166: *Ḥasan II 'alā-dhikrihi 'l-salām* (4 years)  
 559/1164 The Qiyāma: Abolition of *sharī'a* law  
 561/1166–607/1210: *Muḥammad II b. Ḥasan II* (44 years)  
 588/1193 Death of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, head of Syrian Ismā'īlīs  
 590/1194 Saljuqs replaced by Khwārazmians in 'Irāq-i 'Ajam

#### *Imāms of the Satr*

- 607/1210–618/1221: *Ḥasan III b. Jalāl al-Dīn b. Muḥammad II* (11 years)  
 612/1215 Defeat of Mengli  
 618/1221–653/1255: *Muḥammad III 'Alā' al-Dīn b. Ḥasan III* (34 years)  
 628/1231 Death of Sultān Jalāl al-Dīn Khwārazm-Shāh  
 651/1253 Gird-Kūh holds out against the Mongols  
 653/1255–654/1256: *Khur-Shāh Rukn al-Dīn b. Muḥammad III* (1 year)  
 655/1257 Mongols massacre Ismā'īlīs and kill Khur-Shāh

In the midst of states held together by direct military power alone, the Ismā'īlīs—or “Assassins of Alamūt”—formed a challenging exception. From 483/1090 to 654/1256, they maintained a vigorous state of their own. Their state was small and widely scattered territorially, but it retained its cohesiveness throughout a series of upheavals that would have disrupted most polities, and it was strong enough to resist

successfully the relentless enmity of the rest of Muslim society. In the cultural life of the time, moreover, the Ismā'īlī state played a perceptible role—even to the point of acting as host to prominent non-Ismā'īlī intellectuals. We cannot yet trace all the sources of its vitality, but we can make out some of them.

The student of Ismā'īlī history is faced with problems that do not arise in the study of most dynasties. No Ismā'īlī chronicles have survived intact. We must depend on the Sunnī chroniclers, who were most of them blindly hostile to, and ignorant of, Ismā'īlī internal developments. The most important exception is Rashīd al-Dīn Faḍl Allāh, who was not only fair-minded but excerpted extensively the Ismā'īlī chronicles surviving in his time.<sup>1</sup> But the hostility of the chroniclers is a less serious obstacle than our ignorance of the institutions and intellectual assumptions of the Ismā'īlīs. To understand the conditions prevailing among Sunnī Muslims, we have access to a large body of literature which has been preserved in the Sunnī tradition. The Ismā'īlī tradition has preserved very little from that period—only a few doctrinal works. Often we are at a loss to understand what a given event meant in its Ismā'īlī context, even when we are tolerably sure of the date of the event and some of its more visible features. Yet we understand better now than we used to.

Earlier Western scholarship, basing itself on the impressions of the Crusaders as well as on the Sunnī tradition, was inclined to see in the Ismā'īlīs a romantically diabolic “order of assassins”, not quite human in their fanatical subservience to an enigmatic but self-seeking and all-powerful master, the “Old Man of the Mountain”. This picture can no longer be taken seriously. As we use such Ismā'īlī materials as are available and learn to sift the chronicles more cautiously, it proves to be chiefly legendary. But the reality that is emerging turns out to be almost as extraordinary as the legend. That this handful of villagers and small townsmen, hopelessly outnumbered, should again and again reaffirm their passionate sense of grand destiny, reformulating it in every new historical circumstance with unfailing imaginative power and persistent courage—that they should be able so to keep alive not

<sup>1</sup> Rashīd al-Dīn's section on the Ismā'īlīs has now been edited by M. J. Dānesh-Pajuh and M. Modarresy (Tehrān, 1960). See also Juvainī, vol. III, tr. J. A. Boyle, vol. II. Other chronicles, notably that of Ibn al-Athīr, are cited in the relevant notes of Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: the Struggle of the Early Nizari Isma'ilis against the Islamic World* (The Hague, 1955). See also pp. 25–6 of that work; and for the relationship between Rashīd al-Dīn and Juvainī, see *ibid.* p. 73 n.

only their own hopes but the answering fears and covert dreams of all the Islamic world for a century and a half—this in itself is an astonishing achievement. To comprehend it at all, we must understand the vital religious convictions out of which it grew.<sup>1</sup>

## THE ISMĀ'ĪLĪ MOVEMENT UNDER THE GREAT SALJUQS

Shī'is had never been satisfied with the compromises of official Muslim life, which Sunnis had accepted as more or less inevitable up to a point. Shī'is held fast to the hope that, if only Muslims would accept divinely approved leadership, then the high Islamic ideals of equality and godliness among the faithful and an equitable order throughout mankind could be realized in practice. Loyalty to the house of 'Alī had early become identified with such hopes: the true *imāms* (leaders of the Muslim community) were specially designated descendants of 'Alī. Those who maintained loyalty to these imāms considered themselves a Muslim élite (*ḵhāṣṣ*): they alone were true to the real principles of Islam, while the common mass was led astray by temporary appearances of power on the side of other claimants to authority, whom God had not authorized.

For many Shī'is it readily followed that the true imāms were not merely the proper rulers of the world. The imāms, even if unrecognized, represented God's will in the world at all times. Whether in power or not, they were divinely guided to the proper interpretation of religious truths; their interpretation of Qur'ān and of the law was alone binding on Muslims. Indeed, without the insight which originated with the imām, who in turn had inherited it from the Prophet, the text of the Qur'ān could be quite misunderstood by the ordinary unthinking Muslim; for behind the literal reference of its words lay a deeper meaning, more or less symbolical, which only the imām could

<sup>1</sup> The main steps in the development of Nizārī studies by modern Westerners are traced in Hodgson's *Order of Assassins* (hereafter cited as *O.A.*), pp. 22–32. W. Ivanow has done especially important work; but his translations and interpretations are often very arbitrary and misleading, and warnings on their use are to be found in *O.A.*, pp. 31–2, 329, 232 n., 233 n. and 235 n. *The Order of Assassins* (unfortunately mistitled) seems to remain the standard work and will be referred to throughout this chapter. It suffers from some immaturity of scholarship: references are sometimes too imprecise and translations from the Persian too clumsy; above all, too slight an acquaintance with the general political life of the time occasioned some vagueness of focus. Several of its interpretations have been sharpened in this chapter (and some details made more precise). Nevertheless, the argument of the book seems to remain sound, so far as it goes; both political and theological history need to be further explored, however.

elucidate with authority. But only the élite, wholly devoted to Islam, could recognize the special role of the imāms or appreciate the spiritual insight which resulted from their teaching. Exposure of these sacred matters before the common Sunnis would not enlighten them but might rather lead to profanation and persecution of the imām's cause. Until the time was ripe for all mankind to see the truth, Shi'is were invited to exercise *taqiyya* (pious dissimulation), disguising their true convictions under a seeming conformity to the standards of the world. Only at the end of the age, with God's aid, would the imām appear, in triumph, to vindicate his true adherents, and set the world to rights.

Among the several Shi'i movements, that of the Ismā'ilis was distinguished by being organized hierarchically and secretly. Ismā'ilis recognized Ismā'il son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, and Ismā'il's son, as the authorized imāms. But for many years the imāms were held to be in hiding and inactive. Meanwhile, the organization seems to have been self-perpetuating. Adherents were ranked in several grades, in principle according to the degree to which they had advanced in the esoteric teachings ascribed to the imām. An adherent of an upper rank was set over adherents of a lower rank in his own area. Set over all adherents in a given province was the *dā'i*, or head of religious teaching.

The whole organization was kept secret on the principle of *taqiyya*. Among Ismā'ilis this *taqiyya* was more far-reaching than among most Shi'is: the adherent was initiated in a special ceremony and forbidden under oath to reveal anything about the teachings or membership of the community. The doctrine presented as the inner meaning, the *bāṭin*, of the Qur'ān was correspondingly more elaborate. Whereas for some Shi'is it went little beyond the identification of various Qur'ānic phrases as symbolic references to the imām and to the Shi'is' loyalty to him, for Ismā'ilis a whole spiritual cosmos was to be traced in the Qur'ān by those who held the clue—not only in the immediate symbolism of its words but in an extensive set of numerical correspondences. To be an Ismā'ili was to share in the secrets of the universe. The historical origin of the hierarchism and secrecy of the Ismā'ilis is not clear, but in any case they made possible two things as disquieting to Sunnis as they were heartening to many Shi'is: a proliferation of cosmological and historical speculation, often rather sophisticated, without regard to its intelligibility to the masses; and at the same time

an extensive preparation of disciplined cadres to support any political move which the leadership should find desirable.<sup>1</sup>

After the triumph of Ismā'īlī power in Egypt in 257/969, when the Fāṭimid dynasty of caliphs was established, Ismā'īlī hopes everywhere were high. Some Ismā'īlīs may once have doubted the claims to the imāmate put forward by the leader of that section of the Ismā'īlī movement which now seemed to be blessed with success. But soon almost all Ismā'īlīs rallied to the Fāṭimid line. Throughout Iran they recognized the Egyptian Fāṭimids as the true 'Alid imāms, descendants of Ismā'il and entitled, as custodians of the spiritual inheritance of the Prophet, to exclusive obedience among all Muslims. The imām had at last appeared in power. As Fāṭimid arms were attended with victory in Syria and the Ḥijāz, and as Fāṭimid prestige and naval power ensured the new caliph's recognition from Sicily to Sind, Ismā'īlīs could hope that the promised days were at hand, when the imām was to reunite the Muslims, overwhelm the infidels, and "fill the earth with justice as it is now filled with injustice", the long-standing dream of all Shī'is.

Now the whole movement was focused in Cairo at the Fāṭimid court, under the direction of the chief dā'ī there. Dā'īs in the Iranian highlands seem to have been responsible to the chief dā'ī in points of doctrine and in planning overall strategy for the victory of the Ismā'īlī cause in their area—a victory identified with submission to the Egyptian caliphate. Efforts were made to convert local rulers, many of whom were in any case Shī'ī in the tenth and early eleventh centuries, or to find support for military coups on behalf of the imām. As the result of one such coup, Baghdad itself was held briefly in the name of the Fāṭimid caliph. When an Ismā'īlī propagandist was ready to retire from such activities, or to withdraw from them for a time, he went to Cairo, where a number of Iranian Ismā'īlī philosophers, commonly persecuted at home, ended their lives as respected officials. Indeed, the intellectual leadership of Cairo was largely of Iranian origin.

But after the rise of Saljuq power, confidence in Egypt could not but be undermined. In Iran, the several localized dynasties established in

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the references appearing in *O.A.* (especially pp. 13-14, 17), see three articles by S. M. Stern: "Ismā'īlīs and Qarmatians", *L'Elaboration de l'Islam* (Paris, 1961-2), pp. 99-108; "Heterodox Ismā'īlism at the time of al-Mu'izz", *B.S.O.A.S.* (1955), pp. 10-33; and "Abu'l-Qāsim al-Bustī and his refutation of Ismā'īlism", *J.R.A.S.* (1961), pp. 14-35. Likewise Wilferd Madelung, "Fatimiden und Bahrainqarmaten", *Der Islam* (1959), pp. 34-88, with corrections in the same volume; and Madelung, "Das Imamāt in der frühen ismailitischen Lehre", *Der Islam* (1961), pp. 43-135.

Būyid times were replaced by a single strong power, ardently Sunnī. The Egyptian government itself was manifestly weakening; under al-Mustaṣṣir in the 1060s it went through a period of internal chaos which paralysed its foreign policy. After this crisis, from 468/1074 on, the government was directed by a military man, Badr al-Jamālī, who kept the imām under his control. His foreign policy was defensive, and it was clear that he did not expect the Egyptian government to recover the lead it had once had. Its power remained visibly inferior to that of the Saljuqs during the rest of the eleventh century. The promised days of victory and justice seemed indefinitely postponed.

But the Ismā'īlī movement in Saljuq lands, and especially in the Iranian highlands, continued as strong as and perhaps stronger than it was before the Egyptian Fāṭimids appeared and stirred the temporary hope of victory by way of their armies. Ismā'īlīs seem to have been numerous in towns in all parts of Iran, but in this period we have evidence of them in the countryside only in a few areas. Many are reported to have been craftsmen and some appear as merchants; they were often led by men of the liberal professions. They made many converts among common soldiers and occasionally among lesser officers. It is easier to tell what they opposed than whether they had any very concrete positive plans. We have a few details which suggest dislike of the Turks, not surprising among Iranian and Arab populations whom military rule must have irked. (Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ is reported as saying the Turks were *jinn*, not men.) Certainly, at least in a generalized way, they stood against the social injustice of a stratified society, which the occupation by Turkish troops seemed to aggravate; there is a story that the Ismā'īlīs boasted of assassinating a vizier (Niẓām al-Mulk) in revenge for his treatment of a carpenter—who was thus drastically asserted to be his equal. Finally, and perhaps most important, it is clear from the nature of their propaganda that they despised and resented the pettiness and aridity of the personal outlook sometimes encouraged by that *sharī'a*-minded Islam which was taught in the multiplying Sunnī madrasas. The Ismā'īlīs were resisting the Sunnī intellectual and moral synthesis that is often regarded as the glory of the age—an age then being introduced by the Sunnīs after the victory of Sunnī power over the various Shī'ī dynasties.

Iranian Ismā'īlīs, in their struggle with the spirit of the age, did not have to look so far as Egypt to find the means of some sort of co-ordination of their activities. The Ismā'īlīs of the upper Oxus valleys, beyond



the Saljuq presence, had, at least at one time, a local dā'ī independently responsible to Cairo; at any rate they do not seem to have been involved, at least at first, in the movements which took place among the Ismā'ilis in the Saljuq lands. But many, if not most, of the Ismā'ilis under Saljuq rule seem to have owned the authority of a single superior dā'ī, whose headquarters were at Iṣfahān, the chief Saljuq capital. We know that 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh, dā'ī at Iṣfahān in the 1070s, was head of the movement throughout the west Iranian highlands, from Kirmān to Āzarbāijān, if not beyond. We do not know whether any dā'is for *Khurāsān* and *Kūhistān* or for Iraq or the Jazīreh were subordinated to him. It does appear that the Syrian Ismā'ilis, even though their province was being occupied by the Saljuqs, were not placed under Iṣfahān. But 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh was respected for his scholarship even in Sunni circles, and seems to have been a focus of widespread renewed Ismā'ilī activity in the Saljuq dominions.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1080s the Ismā'ilis of the Saljuq lands were preparing active insurrection on an unprecedented pattern. Before any overt moves were made, the Ismā'ilis at Sāveh in 'Irāq-i 'Ajam were accused of murdering a muezzin lest he betray their secrets. More than one dedicated young man was sent to Egypt and came back ready to seize a fortress in revolt. By 483/1090, revolt broke out simultaneously in Dailam and Kūhistān, and in the next few years in many other areas as well. This time the Ismā'ilī hopes were not concentrated on a great army to sweep over all the Muslim lands from a single centre, on the model of the rise of the Egyptian Fāṭimids. Now they were looking to a multiplicity of risings everywhere at once, to overwhelm the established social structure from within.

#### I. REVOLT

The Ismā'ilis of the Iranian highlands and the Fertile Crescent were not destined to overthrow the Saljuqs but rather to found a society apart, which was set over against Muslim society as a whole. We shall trace the fate of this society in four phases, each representing a new departure in their relations with the outside world. After the failure of the initial revolt came the second period, that of stalemate, in which the Ismā'ilis were regrouped on a more permanent basis. From this basis they went

<sup>1</sup> On the organization of those Ismā'ilis who were to become Nizārīs, see *OA*, pp. 45, 64, and 69.

on, in a third period, to attempt a spiritual defiance, consummating their apocalyptic vision among themselves on the level of the inward life. Later yet, as history impinged even on their inwardness, they dreamed of world leadership in a quest which sent their envoys far beyond the old Saljuq territories, and which was terminated only by a special effort of the all-conquering Mongols. But the first and decisive moment was that of their great revolt.

*Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ at Alamūt*

The role of any one man in great historical events is hard to isolate and is limited at best. In the case of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, the most famous figure in the revolt, we have even less basis than usual for judging the role he played. Yet the accounts present him as more than just an ordinary leader, and his personality may well have offered the other Ismā'īlis a crucial rallying-point of unyielding strength. In any case, our story must revolve about him if only because he is the only figure about whom we have even moderately detailed evidence.

Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ tells us, in an autobiographical passage, that he was brought up as a Shī'ī, but that he had supposed Ismā'ilism was just heretical philosophy till a friend whom he respected for his uprightness convinced him—without at first revealing himself as an Ismā'īlī—that the Ismā'īlī imām was the true one. Even so, Ḥasan hesitated to commit himself in the face of the popular opprobrium which the Ismā'īlis suffered. Only after an illness that had seemed fatal, when he thought he would die without having acknowledged the true imām, did he seek out an Ismā'īlī propagandist and become initiated.<sup>1</sup>

He came to the attention of 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh in due time, and was appointed to a post in the Ismā'īlī organization and sent to Egypt, arriving there in 471/1078. On the way, he had to make a detour in southern Syria because of Turkish military operations at the very doorstep of the imām. What we have about his experiences in Egypt, then under the rule of Badr al-Jamālī, seems to be mostly legendary, but he did not see the imām himself and he cannot have been much encouraged to rely on Egyptian power to achieve anything for the Iranians in their own confrontation with Turkish military power. When he came back to Iran after two years, he set out on extensive travels throughout the west Iranian highlands, presumably

<sup>1</sup> On the biography of Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, see *O.A.*, pp. 43–51.

propagandizing and getting acquainted with local circumstances. In the later 1080s he is represented as seeking an appropriate base for carrying out his part in the Ismā'īlī revolt that was to come. We do not know whether this work was still under the direction of 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh, but this is likely, for his repute in the Sunnī chronicles suggests he was still chief dā'ī in that period.

Eventually Ḥasan was appointed dā'ī of Dailam, potentially an important post since that was one of the few regions where the bulk of the population were already Shī'ī. He chose the fortress of Alamūt in Rūdbār (the valley of the Shāhrūd) in the Alburz [Elburz] mountains north of Qazvīn as his base (see the map of Rūdbār and vicinity, p. 431). He won over the garrison to his views by way of secret emissaries, infiltrated the place with converts from elsewhere, and finally arrived himself under a pseudonym. The commandant, realizing the danger, had feigned conversion so as to ferret out the Ismā'īlī leaders and get rid of them, but he had shown his hand too soon and now found himself impotent. Forced to come to terms with Ḥasan, he accepted a check in payment for the fortress and left. The date was 483/1090. Both Ismā'ilīs and Sunnīs regarded this as the first great blow in the revolt.

At about the same time, and at least partly inspired from Alamūt, the Ismā'ilīs of several small towns in Kūhistān, the arid lands south of Khurāsān, declared their independence from the Saljuqs. Taking advantage of insults made by a Saljuq amīr to the locally respected Sīmjurīd family, they identified their cause with local self-respect, and seem to have won solid support in the population. When it became apparent that the local amīrs could not cope with the Ismā'ilīs either at Alamūt or in Kūhistān, larger Saljuq forces were sent in 485/1092 against them in both places. At Alamūt the Ismā'ilīs were few in number at the moment, but some 300 Ismā'ilīs were brought in from around Kazvīn and Ray for the emergency, and the reinforced garrison, supported by Ismā'ilīs from other parts of Rūdbār, was able to make a sally against the Saljuq forces. The Saljuqs were defeated and withdrew. Before they could make a new effort, first the vizier Nizām al-Mulk was assassinated and then Malik-Shāh himself died. The Saljuq force in Kūhistān concentrated on one small town, Dareh, but failed to take it before Malik-Shāh's death led to the break up of the expedition. The Ismā'ilīs had established permanent footholds.<sup>1</sup>

Alamūt was physically a large towering rock, with steep slopes hardly

<sup>1</sup> On the early revolt, see *ibid.* pp. 72-5.

## ḤASAN-I ŠABBĀḤ AT ALAMŪT



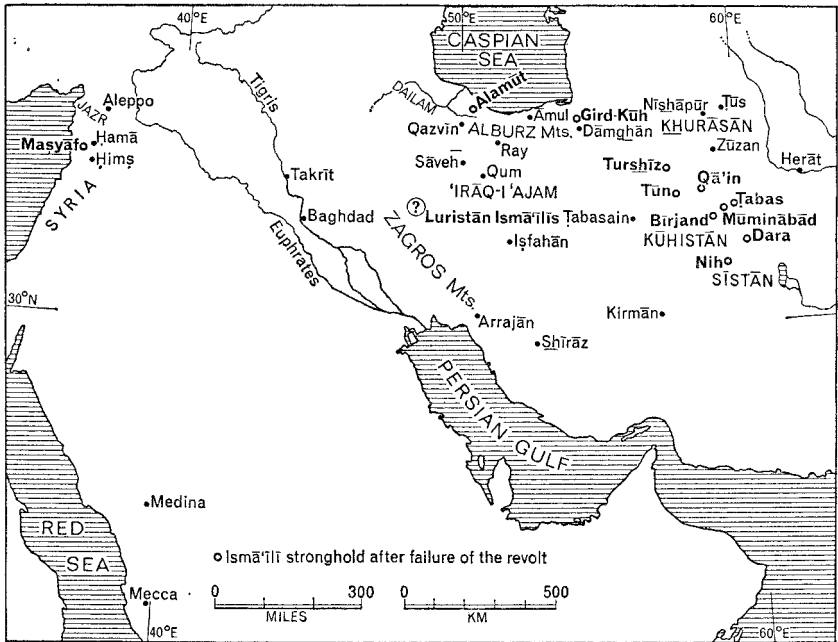
Map 5. Rūdbār and vicinity.

negotiable on most sides, but with a considerable expanse at its top where extensive building could be done. Situated in mountainous terrain, its approaches could be guarded with relative ease. Yet it was strategically placed, commanding the shortest passage between Qazvīn and the Caspian coast, while control of Rūdbār as a whole could permit harassment of the main route between all 'Irāq-i 'Ajam and the Caspian. The Dailamī inhabitants of the area had been long noted for their military capabilities as well as for their *Shi'i* inclinations. It was not the first time Alamūt had served as a rebel's stronghold.<sup>1</sup>

In the years following 485/1092, while intestine Saljuq quarrels gave the Ismā'ilis a respite, Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ made Alamūt as impregnable as possible. He strengthened the fortifications and built up a great store of provisions. It is said he caused vast storerooms to be hollowed out in the rock, in which large amounts of food could be kept in good condition for a long time—presumably largely cut off from air and especially from warmth. He also took care to arrange irrigation for the fields immediately around Alamūt. Physically, Alamūt became as nearly self-sufficient as might be, ready to resist an indefinite siege. Likewise the mood of Alamūt became martial. Personally, Ḥasan set an austere example. Once he had taken up residence there, he is said to have left the four walls of his house only twice, and twice to have gone up on the roof; he spent his time writing and directing operations.

<sup>1</sup> On Alamūt as a site, see Freya Stark, *The Valleys of the Assassins* (London, 1934), pp. 197-251.

## THE ISMĀ'ILĪ STATE



Map 6. The Ismā'īlī State, with important centres in the revolt.

He had his two sons executed, one on the charge of murder (which later proved false) and the other on that of wine-drinking; he sent away his wife and daughters to spin along with other women in a distant fortress at a time of difficulty, and never brought them back. It is said that Ismā'īlī chiefs followed his precedent and never had their women with them while they were executing military command, in contrast to usual Muslim practice. Though Alamūt was probably not the official centre of the movement at first, it was in a position to offer leadership at need.

Once Alamūt was secured and much of Kūhistān independent, the rising proceeded rapidly. A year before Malik-Shāh's death, another fortress had been seized (in 484/1091): Sanamkūh near Abhar, in the mountains westward from Qazvin. On Malik-Shāh's death (485/1092), the quarrels between Berk-Yaruq and Tutush and then Muḥammad Tapar called troops away from any efforts they might have made against the Ismā'īlīs; moreover, they created just the conditions of uncertainty and disorder in which the Ismā'īlīs found numerous opportunities for action and also, perhaps, a more sympathetic hearing for their message of resistance against the Turkish rulers.

Within a few years the Ismā'īlīs held strongholds in a number of mountainous zones in the Iranian highlands. (See the map of the Ismā'īlī state.) Along with Alamūt and some neighbouring places at the western end of the Alburz, they seized at least two other places of defence at the eastern end of that range. In Kūhistān—not a mighty mountain range yet mountainous enough and relatively inaccessible in central Iran just east of the deserts—they controlled a group of towns extending north and south over 200 miles. In the Zagros range, especially in the south around Arrajān, they seized several forts at key spots. In 488/1095, a captain said to be an Ismā'īlī was entrusted with the town of Takrīt on the Tigris, north of Baghdad; but this town does not seem to have become Ismā'īlī in sentiment. Less decisive Ismā'īlī activity is reported from many towns throughout the area of Saljuq rule—even where fortresses were not seized, the Ismā'īlīs became an active faction in the cities, even, as in Kirmān and Aleppo, winning the support of Turkish amīrs themselves, at least for a time.<sup>1</sup>

*The new doctrine*

The official Ismā'īlī doctrine at Cairo had developed into a complex and sophisticated cosmological system, in which one might think the only role of the dā'īs and other ranks in the organization was to learn and teach a proliferating stock of esoteric lore. All this learning was certainly not rejected by those Ismā'īlīs who were launching the rebellion. But observers got the impression that there was a “new teaching” associated with the movement which could be contrasted with the old; and this would not be surprising. If there was, however, it was not a wholly new system but a new emphasis and development of a doctrine of long standing among Ismā'īlīs and indeed among Shi'īs generally: the doctrine of *ta'lim*, authoritative teaching. Those Sunnīs who were most closely acquainted with the Ismā'īlī movement at the time concentrated on this doctrine as the main Ismā'īlī thesis, and later Ismā'īlī writings refer to the doctrine in contexts which likewise associate it with the time of the revolt. In its fully developed form, the doctrine is ascribed in particular to Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, who expounded it in a Persian essay. But we cannot assume that he is the one who developed it; 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh, for instance, was intellectually

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 'Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rīkh*, A.H. 492, 494, 500; and O.A., pp. 75–8, which the present account makes more precise.

active and was more prominent than Ḥasan at the time when the doctrine was first taken notice of; but we have no writings of his to go by.<sup>1</sup>

The Shī'is had always condemned the Sunnīs for presuming to choose for themselves in religious questions—starting with the choice of Abū Bakr as first caliph, admittedly not designated by Muḥammad as his successor, whereas the Shī'is were sure that 'Alī had been divinely indicated as the successor. Then the Sunnīs had continued, in the Shī'ī view, to interpret religious truth and in particular the sharī'a law arbitrarily, according to their own sense of propriety: they even called the founders of their great schools of law imāms, though these founders could claim no special status except that which resulted from the respect accorded them by their own followers. The Shī'is, in contrast, claimed to base their understanding of religious truth and law on the teaching of true imāms, designated not by human choice but (like the Prophet himself) by divine election. If Islam could be founded only by divine authority, surely it must be interpreted also by divine authority. Men were no more in a position to decide on ultimate truth in subsequent times than in the time of Muḥammad himself. Accordingly, over against the Sunnī systems of determining law the Shī'is set their own doctrine, that one must seek the only authoritative teaching, ta'lim, that of the authoritatively designated 'Alid imāms.

As to how Muslims were to know who was the true imām, Shī'is were not at a loss to adduce evidentiary miracles; but every sophisticated person knew how limited the evidentiary strength of any wonder is; hence on a sophisticated level the Shī'ī case was really made to rest on history. If one were once convinced, by the logic of the situation, that a true imām *must* have been designated (for God would not be so inconsistent as to appoint a prophet and then leave mankind in the dark as to the imāms to come after him), then one looked for any relevant indications; and it was not hard to find anecdotes about the Prophet which could be construed as designating 'Alī to succeed him. 'Alī in turn, and each of the other imāms, could be assumed to have designated his own successor.

But such a proof of the imām's identity is by no means rigorous. Moreover it presupposes that one has already accepted Muḥammad as Prophet. In Ḥasan's book, mentioned by several writers and sum-

<sup>1</sup> On the authorship and role of the new doctrine, see *O.A.*, p. 52; also pp. 131-2.

marized for us by Shahrastānī, this argument was transformed into an incisive and self-contained instrument for validating the Ismā'īlī position regardless of one's prior commitment. Ḥasan's work established four propositions. First, either one needs a teacher to know ultimate truth—truth about God—or one does not; but if not, one has no grounds for preferring one's own speculations to those of another, since this is implicitly to teach the other, or at least to accept one's own authority in preference to his. With this proposition, the position of Muslims generally was asserted against philosophers who denied the need for any authority at all. The second proposition was that either the required teacher must be authoritative, or any teacher will do; but if any teacher will do, we are in as bad a situation as if we had no teacher at all, for we have no ground for preferring one teacher to another. With this proposition, the Shī'īs' insistence on authoritative teaching, ta'lim, was asserted against the Sunnīs, who, in any given generation, must depend on a host of learned men none of whom is inherently more authoritative than the others. But Ḥasan's third proposition brought out the weakness of the ordinary Shī'īs themselves. Either the authority of the authoritative teacher must be proved or any teacher may be accepted as authoritative, which would leave us where we were before; but how can his authority be proved except on the basis of some further authority?—which authority would have to be proved in turn.

With the fourth proposition, Ḥasan showed how the authority of the final teacher could be known not through something beyond itself but by way of the structure of knowledge itself. All true knowledge requires a contrast of two opposites, which can be known only through each other; thus we can conceive the (Aristotelian) "necessary" only by contrast to what is merely possible—and the "possible" only by contrast to what is inherently necessary. Neither can be conceived without the other. Again, in the phrase "no god but God", the unique God can be conceived properly only by contrast to the many godlings; while we see the inanity of these godlings only by contrast to God Himself. The phrase "no god but God", in turn, cannot stand without its complement, "Muḥammad is God's Prophet": God's unity can be properly known only by way of the Prophet's revelation, while the very notion of prophethood presupposes the idea of God. A like conjunction of opposites determines the very source of ultimate knowledge itself—the relation between the individual



person who wishes to know and the authoritative teacher whom he must discover. The reasoning of the individual, if he pursues it rigorously, leads him to the dilemma presented in the third proposition: not only can the reason not discover ultimate truth for itself, it cannot even determine what authority to turn to. On the other hand, the claimant to ultimate authority, the imām, cannot substantiate his claims by recourse to any proof beyond himself, or he ceases to claim ultimate authority. But put the individual's reasoning and the authoritative teacher, the imām, together, and each solves the other's dilemma. What the individual's reasoning does is show him, not the imām, but his need for the imām and for his teaching, his ta'lim. It is only when reasoning has reached this point that the imām can present himself as fulfilling this very need. That imām, then, is true who does not allege extraneous proofs for his imāmate but only his own existence as fulfilling the need which, and only which, reasoning can demonstrate. This imām, said Ḥasan, is the imām of the Ismā'ilis.<sup>1</sup>

Such an argument presupposes that there is a truth which is absolute and ultimate and yet unconditionally rational—a common enough assumption, in pre-modern times at least, which only Ṣūfis were successfully challenging in Ḥasan's day. Given this intellectual atmosphere, the argument was hard to refute directly. Moreover, as compared with the general Shi'ī notion of ta'lim, the more refined doctrine of ta'lim which Ḥasan presented was not only more rigorous logically but more self-sufficient. It did not deduce the position of the imām from the position of the Prophet, but rather deduced the prophethood of Muḥammad from the office of the imām, whose authoritative teaching provided the only ultimate demonstration of the validity of prophethood. Thus the Ismā'ili doctrine was supported on its own terms independently of any doctrine accepted by the Sunnī community at large.

The rigor and self-sufficiency of the doctrine were appropriate to the new sternness required of a movement in active and universal revolt. In effect, it laid its emphasis upon the movement itself, rather than on any ulterior reality or purpose to which the movement was the means. The imām was self-sufficient and the movement to establish his authority was self-contained, not to be justified by any given practical consequences. The critics complained that, in effect, this authoritative teacher taught nothing but his own authority. For men in the stress

<sup>1</sup> Shahrastānī's summary of Ḥasan's book is translated in the appendix to *O4* and analysed there on pp. 52-61.

of an all-encompassing rebellion, it was precisely loyalty to the movement—expressed as loyalty to the imām as its head—that mattered; once they were committed to the revolt, there was no leisure to consider questions which might divide or at least confuse them. Presumably, indeed, older and less urgent Ismā'īlī doctrines continued to be taught, but Ḥasan's doctrine of ta'lim could well help to unite and discipline the movement in its immediate urgency.

### *The schism*

In the midst of the risings, the Ismā'īlī movement suffered an internal schism which tested the vitality of its doctrine. In 487/1094 died al-Mustaṣṣir of Egypt. The Fāṭimid state was now in the hands of al-Afḍal, son of Badr al-Jamālī, as vizier. Badr had married al-Afḍal's sister to a younger son of al-Mustaṣṣir, whom al-Afḍal now raised to the caliphate as al-Musta'li. But it was an older son, Nizār, who had been known to have been designated by al-Mustaṣṣir as future imām. Nizār revolted with the support of an anti-Afḍal military faction and of the Ismā'īlī *qāḍī* of Alexandria, and was put down only the next year. Within Egypt and in the Yemen, the majority of Ismā'īlīs went along with al-Afḍal and accepted al-Musta'li as the true imām; but in Syria the Ismā'īlīs were sharply divided, and in the rest of the Saljuq-ruled lands they insisted on the rights of Nizār, which they continued to recognize even when he was finally executed. The Iranian Ismā'īlīs did not, however, attempt then to interfere actively in Egypt, nor did they even identify any one of the descendants of Nizār as claimant to power in Egypt.

For the Egyptian state it was an advantage to retain power in the vizierial family by recognizing their creature, al-Musta'li. Al-Afḍal continued the cautious and firm policies of his father. But what was advantageous to the conservative Egyptian state would have been at most an encumbrance to the rebels against the Saljuqs, to whom the state gave no effective support. For the Iranians, it may well have been with relief that they found themselves no longer tied to the Fāṭimid power, free to pursue their own policies without the danger of inappropriate intervention from Cairo.

The justification of the schism, however, was quite legitimately doctrinal. The basis on which the Ismā'īlīs, at least retrospectively, had justified their adherence to Ismā'īlī and his son (as against Mūsā, whom

the Twelvers followed) was that Ja'far al-Šādiq had explicitly designated Ismā'il as the next imām, and that a subsequent designation of another son—supposing it had occurred—could not validly supersede the first designation. Al-Afḍal claimed that al-Mustansir had designated al-Musta'li on his deathbed, but it was understandable that pious Ismā'ilis should hold by the earlier designation of Nizār. Nevertheless, on Nizār's death a difficulty arose. Nizār seems to have designated no one of his sons as his successor; at any rate, no Nizārid rose to claim the imāmate. Who then was the imām of the rebel Ismā'ilis (who now called themselves Nizārīs)?<sup>1</sup>

Before long, many outsiders and probably some Nizārī Ismā'ilis believed that a son or grandson of Nizār had been smuggled out of Egypt and was kept secretly at Alamūt. But we have no evidence that this was done, and some evidence that it was not: later, the Egyptian government could claim to know that all the male descendants of Nizār were quiescent; the notion of a descendant of Nizār being at Alamūt had to take the form of his having been a posthumous son by a slave girl, and hence unknown in Cairo. At any rate, at Alamūt no account seems to have been taken of the presence of any Nizārid. If we may judge by bits and shreds of evidence in later Ismā'ili works, no imām at all was named, after Nizār. It was known that one of the Nizārids must be he, but not which one. Eventually, it seems, Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ, as the most important of the dā'īs, was recognized as *ḥujja*, "proof", of the imām. The term *ḥujja* had already been used, at least informally, of a figure in the ideal spiritual hierarchy ranking next after the imām; now its use seems to have become more precise: Ḥasan was custodian of the Ismā'ili mission until the imām should reappear, at which time he would point out the imām to the faithful.

When this interpretation was adopted we cannot tell, but there is nothing against its having been adopted already in Ḥasan's lifetime; perhaps it was accepted at the same time as his leadership of the whole movement. We have still less way of knowing how Ḥasan himself felt about the doctrine, which presumably had not been taught him by any actual imām though it concerned the most ultimate truths, which should come by ta'lim. Yet the imām had been inaccessible to the faithful before, in the days before the rise of the Fāṭimids, and Ḥasan might

<sup>1</sup> The Nizārīs are properly to be distinguished, not from "Musta'lians", but from the Ṭayyibīs on the one hand and the Ḥāfiẓīs on the other. For a discussion of the schism see O.A., pp. 62-9.

well feel himself divinely singled out, with his logical gifts, for bearing a burden now which someone had borne before. For the faithful generally, the expectation of the near-coming of a promised imām, whose mere humanity meanwhile was veiled by absence, might be more inspiring than a present and all-too-human ruler who in fact contributed nothing positive to the cause anyway. In Ḥasan's doctrine, the role of the imām had become so abstract as to amount to little more than a guarantee of the validity of the Ismā'īlī movement as such. In the atmosphere of total dedication and imminent expectations which must have surrounded the Ismā'īlī risings, such a role could be played perhaps as well by an abstract postulate as by a distant and irrelevant monarch.

### *Methods of struggle*

The revolt was unprecedented in form. The very leadership of the risings in their first years seems to have been as decentralized as the sites of their activity. After 'Abd al-Malik-i 'Aṭṭāsh's death, there is no assurance that the dā'ī of Iṣfahān had even a nominal precedence over an important dā'ī like that of Dailam. But the dā'īs did co-operate, and the revolt soon showed a characteristic overall pattern precisely in its co-ordinated decentralization.

Many movements which aimed at reforming Muslim society had taken as their model Muḥammad's emigration to Medina, accordingly, they set up a *dār al-hijra*, a place of emigration, as headquarters for their campaign, from which to return victoriously into Muslim society at large as Muḥammad had returned to Mecca. For the early Khārijis this had been a military camp to which all the truly faithful ought to move, and which commonly was shifted freely about the countryside as a base for something like guerilla warfare. For the Shī'is it had usually been a fixed base, where a strong army could be recruited and from which the other provinces could be conquered in regular military operations, as had happened in the rise of the 'Abbāsids and of the Fāṭimids. For the rebel Ismā'īlīs now there were many dār al-hijras, as many as there were local groups who could seize a stronghold for themselves and hold out against the established rulers. But all these dār al-hijras formed one community, and if one of them was lost, its people could find refuge in another.

At almost every town there was an Ismā'īlī cell. Such cells seem to have become the nucleus for armed bands, which—like some other

armed bands formed in the artisan population—could even be accepted as allies in the fighting by one Saljuq faction against another. It was such armed bands that seized key fortresses as defensible headquarters—or occasionally were granted them by an amīr who was glad to use their support. Such fortresses were garrisoned in a fairly conventional way: in each case, the troops were likely to owe allegiance first to their immediate commander, and only through him to the Saljuq regime or some faction in it. Hence it was not always immediately clear whether a given fortress was in Ismā'īlī hands or merely in the hands of a commander willing to use Ismā'īlī manpower. When necessary, an Ismā'īlī garrison could maintain its position by offering submission to some Saljuq amīr—which merely meant that it would send him part of any taxes raised on the surrounding lands and send forces to join in his battles. In the towns themselves, naturally, the ambiguity was even greater. Since the Ismā'īlīs kept their allegiance secret, only the fulltime leaders were likely to be identified with any certainty by public rumour. As the Sunnī public came to recognize the revolt as a serious threat, the Ismā'īlīs still in the towns began to look like a secret fifth column within the gates.

The decentralized pattern of the revolt was appropriate to the times. There was no longer, after Malik-Shāh's death, a single all-powerful Saljuq ruler to be replaced. But even before his death, with the decay of a centralized bureaucracy, the Islamic lands had come to be increasingly parcelled out in the hands of individual commanders of garrisons; to subdue the Saljuq domains meant subduing them all piecemeal. Even on the civilian side, the social structure put power in the hands of individuals of local standing, qāḍīs or prominent *'ulamā*—individuals whose power often resulted less from any special office dependent on a central authority than from relatively informal ties of local prestige and private patronage. There scarcely existed any single target for a military conquest by a regularly organized army, conquest which would have resulted in the submission of an obedient realm as had happened in Egypt. If the Ismā'īlīs were to win, it was reasonable to expect that, at least at first, it would be locality by locality, fort by fort.

The same atomization of power suggested the use of an important auxiliary technique for achieving military and political aims: assassination. Where local authority was relatively personal, so that an official furnished with basically the same means of power as another official did not automatically succeed him, the elimination of a key individual

could disrupt any social undertaking. Thus the death of Malik-Shāh automatically terminated the expedition against Kūhistān; it was thought of, not as a project of the state, but as the personal command of Malik-Shāh himself, and the new ruler would have to launch it all over again if he cared to. In these circumstances, assassination was quite commonly resorted to by all factions.

At first, doubtless, the Ismā'īlīs resorted to it as an occasional convenience, as did anyone else. But before long they made a relatively systematic use of it. It is clear that they did not rely solely on assassination or the threat of it, nor did they always bring it into play even in the case of notorious enemies. But they used it sufficiently often so that almost any assassination was likely to be ascribed to them, and many prominent Sunnī figures took precautions against it—even to wearing armour beneath their regular clothes. The Ismā'īlīs seem to have thought of it as a specially meritorious service in the war for the holy cause; those ready to accomplish missions of assassination were called *fidā'īs*, devotees, and received special honour. (And if they were killed in action they would be rewarded as martyrs in Paradise, of course, according to the general Muslim doctrine.) Perhaps it was felt that it was better to kill one great man who caused trouble than to slaughter many ordinary men on a battlefield—a viewpoint presumably more acceptable to the Ismā'īlīs, who looked on the Sunnī leaders as traitors to Islam, than to the Sunnīs, who thought that the death of a great man, on whom the social order depended, was more disastrous than the death of many peasants. Certainly the risky action of killing a great man, who was normally surrounded by armed servants, was glorified as heroic. The Ismā'īlīs preferred to do it in as public a setting as possible, since part of the purpose was to intimidate any others who took too strong a position against them. Many of the murders were consequently highly dramatic; and the assassins did not often escape with their lives.

The Ismā'īlīs' readiness to use assassination went so far, it seems, that already in the days of the revolt they were willing to use it not only for their own immediate purposes but also in aid of non-Ismā'īlī political allies. Much later the Ismā'īlī chiefs were willing to hire out assassins to relatively friendly rulers for pay, but in the time of the revolt, even if an assassination were on behalf of a friend, it was clearly undertaken with an eye to the strategic advantage to the Ismā'īlīs of that friend's career; no clear line could be drawn between the several

purposes for which assassination might be used. It is doubtful if the assassinations were specially ritualized at that period, or that the assassins formed a special corps, as later they probably did; all Ismā'ilis called one another "comrades", and presumably all were in principle ready to perform any needful act in the common struggle. But doubtless some men held themselves in special readiness and were likely to be called on. It seems that at some point the practice arose of sending Ismā'ilis to insinuate themselves into the households of various great men as servants, who would be in a position to kill such men if they made themselves troublesome. A dramatic warning could be given—a knife by the sleeping man's cushion, with a note attached—so that the man would realize his peril without being able to identify the responsible member of the household, and be persuaded, by way of precaution, to curb his hostility to the Ismā'ilis.<sup>1</sup> It is not clear how often such means were used, but one or two cases would be sufficient to stimulate a general fear of such secret Ismā'ili agents; no one knew whether he was one of those selected for secret surveillance. That fear would be quite as effective in many cases as the actual presence of an Ismā'ili in a given household. Nevertheless, normally assassination was carried out not by members of the household but by men specially sent to perform it, who stalked their victim till an appropriate occasion offered—as at a mosque or in a bath.

The assassinations were balanced almost from the beginning by massacres. The assassination of a popular leader or preacher who had initiated or incited action against the Ismā'ilis could rouse the Sunni population of a town to round up all those in town who were suspected of being Ismā'ilis and then kill them summarily. Those who took the lead in such a massacre became themselves, in turn, the targets of assassination attempts. Massacres and assassinations appear together, frequent in some periods and areas, infrequent in others; rarely was one phenomenon unaccompanied by the other. The massacres were spurred by tales of Ismā'ili atrocities—Ismā'ilis were accused of bearing an indiscriminate hostility against mankind, or at least against all Muslims, and no sadistic practice seemed too improbable to be ascribed to them. About 486/1093 Iṣfahān was outraged by the report that a certain couple had been luring passing young men into an obscure alley (a blind man would ask a young man to guide him home there) and

<sup>1</sup> Such a ruse was employed, according to Juvainī (transl. Boyle, pp. 681-2), by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ himself in order to intimidate Sulṭān Sanjar.

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putting them to death in their house in exquisite and gradual tortures; the couple were identified as Ismā'īlī, and they and all others accused of the same allegiance were dragged to a large bonfire and burned alive. As in all such cases of mass fright, many besides Ismā'īlīs fell victim to the massacres: anyone could get rid of an enemy by making a plausible accusation.<sup>1</sup>

Between assassinations and massacres, popular feeling hardened against the Ismā'īlīs. They were called by many names, notably *Bāṭiniyya* (men of the *bāṭin*, the inner meaning of texts); *Malāḥida* (heretics *par excellence*); and in Syria *Ḥashīshiyya* (smokers of *ḥashīsh*, narcotic hemp). The latter name was sufficiently current locally to be picked up by the Crusaders, under the form "Assassin" (from *Ḥashāshīn*); it became the normal Occidental designation of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs and was ultimately used, as a common noun, for anyone who committed what readers of Crusading history associated most with them: public murders. The name also became the basis for several modern misunderstandings. It has been supposed, for instance, that the *fidā'īs* sent on assassination missions were drugged with *ḥashīsh*—which would have been singularly inappropriate to the patient waiting and perfect timing which the assassinations required. It has also been supposed, on the basis of a modern reinterpretation of Muslim legends, that *ḥashīsh* was used to give the *fidā'īs* dreams of Paradise, convincing them to kill the more readily so as to go to Paradise as their reward; but for this there is no more real evidence than for the other. The name seems to have been used simply as an ugly sobriquet, perhaps on the basis of some now-forgotten local incident. In any case, it represented the popular feeling, which combined contempt and hatred with a bewildered astonishment at the Ismā'īlīs' mad courage.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Saljuq counteroffensive*

At the start of the revolt it was still possible to evaluate the Ismā'īlīs in differing ways. It seems that several, but not all, captains on Berk-Yaruq's side looked on the Ismā'īlī bands as little more than another faction among the subject population, to be co-operated with when convenient, as would be done with local bands of Sunnis. Berk-Yaruq's

<sup>1</sup> On the methods used in the struggle and in its repression, see *O.A.*, pp. 77-84, 87-9, 110-15; on assassination, see especially pp. 82-4, 110-15.

<sup>2</sup> On the name "Assassin", see *O.A.*, pp. 135-7, and references there.



brothers and enemies, Muḥammad and Sanjar, gained prestige among the more consciously Sunnī by refusing any dealing with the Ismā'īlīs. But whatever the amīrs' attitude, none of them on either side had leisure to campaign against the Ismā'īlīs, except sporadically as the occasion arose in the course of other activities. From the time of the schism with Egypt till the death of Berk-Yaruq (498/1104), the Ismā'īlī fortunes seemed to be steadily on the rise.

About 492/1099 the *ra'īs* Muẓaffar, a secret Ismā'īlī well connected among the Saljuq officers at Iṣfahān, persuaded one of Berk-Yaruq's amīrs to acquire Gird-Kūh, a strong fortress in the Alburz near Dām-ghān in Qūmis, and to install him there as his lieutenant. Gird-Kūh was along the main route between western Iran and Khūrāsān—part of the famous route between the Fertile Crescent and the Mediterranean to the west and the Tarim Basin and China to the east. As Ḥasan had done at Alamūt, the *ra'īs* Muẓaffar strengthened and stocked up the fortress as for an indefinite siege. A troop of Ismā'īlīs from Kūhistān intervened on Berk-Yaruq's side shortly after, in 493/1100, in a battle near there between the *ra'īs*'s patron and Sanjar, but they were unable to save the day for Berk-Yaruq; and the *ra'īs*'s patron was killed in the fighting. The *ra'īs* nevertheless carried his patron's treasure to Gird-Kūh and held that stronghold, some time afterward openly declaring himself an Ismā'īlī.

But even closer to the middle of things, at least politically, was the seizure of the fortress Shāhdīz not far from Iṣfahān. Aḥmad-i 'Aṭṭāsh, the son of 'Abd al-Malik, set up as schoolmaster at the garrison, which was composed of presumably Shī'ī Dailamīs, and won them over; by about 494/1100 he was master of the place, and soon the Ismā'īlīs were able to collect taxes in the nearby lands to the detriment of the Saljuq treasury. The Ismā'īlīs seized a second fortress in the vicinity, Khālīnjān, about the same time. Aḥmad's father is said to have retired to Alamūt under Ḥasan's protection at about this time, as a result of rising hostility in Iṣfahān; but the report seems questionable. In any case, he was no longer active by now. Aḥmad had the reputation of being a learned man, though not so much so as his father; the Sunnī reports speak of him as if he were his father's successor as *dā'ī* at Iṣfahān and probably as head of the whole Nizārī movement.

By this time, the association of some of Berk-Yaruq's captains with the Ismā'īlīs was proving disastrous. While the opposing Saljuq forces accused all Berk-Yaruq's men of Ismā'īlism, and Berk-Yaruq

was held responsible for Ismā'īlī attacks on amīrs who opposed him, he was himself attempted by assassins when he appointed a vizier who was strongly anti-Ismā'īlī. In 494/1101, Berk-Yaruq in western Iran and Sanjar in Khurāsān came to an agreement to regard the Ismā'ilīs no longer as local bands but as a general threat to Saljuq power, and to act against them. The chief fruit of Berk-Yaruq's resolve was a grand massacre of suspected Ismā'ilīs at Iṣfahān, Baghdad, and elsewhere. Army officers were especially affected and several of them fled. Sanjar, with fewer friends of the Ismā'ilīs to purge within his own ranks, sent instead an expedition against Ṭabas in Kūhistān, which was said to have been bought off after causing much devastation; and three years later he sent another which wrecked Ṭabas and destroyed as much else as possible. The second expedition, as a *jihād* (holy war), was joined by many Sunnī volunteers in addition to the regular troops, and the Ismā'īlī captives, as apostates, were enslaved. Yet the next year Ismā'ilīs from Turshīz in Kūhistān were in a position to raid a Sunnī caravan as far west as Ray; and in Berk-Yaruq's lands no Ismā'īlī fortresses seem to have been overthrown at all.

Meanwhile, the Ismā'īlī position was being consolidated in Rūdbār, where several other fortresses were aligned with Alamūt, apparently in many cases by agreement with the local leaders, who received aid from the Ismā'ilīs against domination from Ray and Qazvīn. The most important addition was Lanbasar, considerably west of Alamūt in the Shāhrūd valley. After its garrison went back on their first agreement with the Ismā'ilīs, it was re-subjugated by Ḥasan's lieutenant Buzurg-Ummīd and built into a major stronghold. In Syria in this period the Ismā'ilīs controlled as yet no fortresses, but they were strong in Aleppo and in the nearby towns of the Jazr region, and they enjoyed the patronage of Ridwān, Saljuq amīr of Aleppo.

With the advent to power of Muḥammad Tapar, however, the more important dynastic disputes ended and the Saljuq forces made greater headway against the Ismā'īlī revolt. Even in Syria, Ridwān turned gradually against the Ismā'ilīs, who had become embarrassing, and he allowed more than one massacre of them; on his death in 507/1113, they were scattered from their headquarters in Aleppo and for some time sought vainly a citadel which they could hold for their own. Most of the Ismā'īlī strongholds in the Zagros mountains seem to have fallen during Muḥammad's reign. In 500/1107 Muḥammad sent an expedition against Takrīt; to avoid letting it fall into his hands, its

master turned it over to an Arab chief, Ṣadaqa, who was a Shī'ī but no Ismā'īlī.

The most important project, led by Muḥammad in person, was to rid the neighbourhood of Iṣfahān of its Ismā'ilīs. Aḥmad-i 'Aṭṭāsh negotiated long and, for a time, successfully to maintain himself in Shāhdīz, arguing that he was a Muslim and should be accepted as a legitimate garrison chief so long as he submitted to Muḥammad's overall direction—that is, above all, paid him tribute and served in his wars. There were those in Iṣfahān who were willing to let him serve if in future he would indeed be obedient to the Saljuq ruler. But the more zealous Sunnī 'ulamā turned the day by arguing that the Ismā'ilīs were not in fact true Muslims; that by exalting the *bāṭin*, the supposed inner meaning of the law, they had abandoned Islam even though they still observed the law, as they did. In this case no accommodation could be made with them. Finally a capitulation was agreed to in 500/1107 in which many of the Ismā'ilīs were allowed safe-conduct to more distant Ismā'īlī fortresses while the nucleus of the garrison was to surrender outright when the others had got away. In the end the nucleus resisted nonetheless, fighting even for the last turrets. Aḥmad was finally captured, paraded ignominiously through the town, and skinned alive.

Sanjar was encouraged to send a further expedition against the Ismā'ilīs of Kūhistān. But we hear more of the expedition against Alamūt. After the fall of Shāhdīz and the death of the *dā'ī* of Iṣfahān, if not even earlier (as some reports seem to suggest, at least in some Ismā'īlī circles), Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ presumably was acknowledged as head of the whole Nizārī Ismā'īlī movement, and Alamūt as its headquarters. After a futile expedition by the vizier himself, a son of Nizām al-Mulk, the reduction of Alamūt was entrusted to Shīrgīr, the amīr of Sāveh. He tried attrition, taking some places fairly near Qazvīn, but above all Rūdbār in a yearly expedition for seven years. At length, in 511/1118, he was ready for a full-scale siege. Other amīrs were sent to help him. But as the surrender of Alamūt seemed to draw near, the news of Malik-Shāh's death arrived and the army broke up despite Shīrgīr's pleas. Alamūt was saved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the Saljuq counteroffensive, see *OA*, pp. 76–8, 84–9, 95–8.

## THE TERRITORIAL POSITION

### II. STALEMATE

Though Alamūt was safe, the revolt as such was over. In the almost thirty years since Alamūt had been seized, the Ismā'īlīs had done their best to establish themselves throughout the Saljuq domains; they had posed a serious threat to Saljuq rule for a time, with considerable strength in and around Iṣfahān itself. But their partisans in the cities had been massacred or disorganized, and many of their strongholds had been destroyed. What remained could not seriously serve as a base for general revolt, at least not till their party had been widely rebuilt and a new effort prepared. The imām had never appeared in power to save the situation, and the times did not seem propitious for him to do so now. To be sure, the rebellion had been successful on a local basis in Rūdbār and Kūhistān, where whole districts had asserted and maintained their independence of the Saljuqs. But with the failure of the overall effort, one might have expected the surviving Ismā'īlīs to break up into local groupings and to be assimilated into the evolving Sunnī social and political structure on a local *ad hoc* basis. Yet the Ismā'īlīs held together from Kūhistān to Syria. The sons of the rebels were still dedicated. A further generation with essentially the same puritan and power-oriented outlook had to pass before a new beginning would be attempted. Meanwhile the Ismā'īlīs carried on the old struggle as best they could.

#### *Definition of the territorial position*

Though there was no major succession dispute on Muḥammad Tapar's death, his successor at Iṣfahān, Maḥmūd, and Sanjar, as general head of the Saljuqs, were sufficiently occupied with other troubles not to press much further against the Ismā'īlīs. Sanjar is said to have made a truce with the Ismā'īlīs, persuaded by a dagger which Ḥasan contrived to have thrust into the floor next to Sanjar's pillow. The historian Juvainī found conciliatory letters from Sanjar in the Ismā'īlī archives. The Ismā'īlīs at Alamūt reoccupied fortresses which they had given up to Shīrgīr. During the rest of his life (to 518/1124) Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ, while remaining dā'ī of Dailam, seems to have been regarded as head of the community. He presumably devoted himself to consolidating its position in the territories it had won, and perhaps also to reaffirming, in some degree, a central authority over them.

These territories consisted primarily of two main districts: Rūdbār

and a large part of Kūhistān. Rūdbār was felt to be the core portion of Dailam and inherited the militant and particularist temper of the Dailamī mountaineers. There were dozens of fortresses in its mountains, not only in the Alburz proper north of the Shāhrūd but in the lower mountains between that valley and Qazvīn; the Ismā'ilīs sometimes held a fortress or so sufficiently near Qazvīn to serve as a special irritant to the Qazvīnīs. The chief of the Rūdbār Ismā'ilīs, who was also head of the whole community, commonly resided at Alamūt, but by no means always. The most immediate neighbours and enemies of Rūdbār were Qazvīn to the south and Rūyān to the north (between the Alburz and the sea); accordingly, the rulers of 'Irāq-i 'Ajam at Iṣfahān and of Māzandarān at Āmul, the respective suzerains of those two neighbours, intermittently felt it their duty to destroy the Ismā'ilī power, which lay between their territories. The Ismā'ilī territory in Kūhistān was distinctly more extensive, including several towns more substantial than any in Rūdbār. In the north, Turshīz was readily involved in hostilities with the authorities in Khurāsān, while Nih in the south was commonly at odds with Sistān. The Kūhistānī Ismā'ilīs owned the authority of a single chief, appointed at Alamūt, who resided usually, but not always, in either Tūn or Qā'in or in the fortress of Mu'minābād.

In addition to the two main territories, the Ismā'ilī state included three other scattered tracts. The other fortresses in the eastern Alburz seem to have been lost, but Gird-Kūh at Dāmghān was held and stood isolated but firm as an Ismā'ilī outpost. Though the fortresses in the southern Zagros had been lost, farther north in the Zagros, in Luristān, some fortresses were retained or else soon after acquired, with the support of some local Jewish clans. Lastly, after Ḥasan's death, the Ismā'ilīs in Syria finally acquired their long-sought independent base in the mountains west of Ḥamā and Ḥims, where they acquired a small group of fortified towns; here they were ruled by an appointee of Alamūt, who sometimes resided at Maṣyāf.

For a time, even after Ḥasan's death, the Ismā'ilī community included not only those in the independent territories but a substantial number in at least some Iranian cities. Correspondingly, not everyone in Rūdbār or (probably) in Ismā'ilī Kūhistān was an Ismā'ilī. But gradually we cease to hear of Ismā'ilīs outside of their own territories, except in the Jazr district of Syria, east of Aleppo, and possibly in parts of Kūhistān and Sistān that were not ruled by Ismā'ilīs. Doubtless

some such Ismā'īlis persisted, though without playing a large role in the Ismā'īlī state, or presumably, in the fortunes of the religious community. At some time, but we do not know whether in the Alamūt period, the numerous Ismā'īlis of the upper Oxus basin were won over to the Nizārī position. But in large measure the state formed henceforth an independent Ismā'īlī society with little stake in the wider Sunnī society except so far as its often active trade and, indeed, its continuing intellectual interests, enforced interaction.<sup>1</sup>

*The continuing struggle*

On Ḥasan-i Šabbāh's death in 518/1124, his position as dā'ī of Dailam and as head of the community fell to his lieutenant at Lanbasar, Buzurg-Ummīd. This man was well connected, at least by marriage, with ruling families in the Caspian region, but clearly he was chosen also for his personal qualities. He moved to Alamūt and carried on the rigorous policies of his predecessor, aided by a council of three advisers who had also been appointed by Ḥasan. One gets the impression that the Ismā'īlis' enemies hoped he would prove a lesser man than Ḥasan; within two years of his accession, the Saljuqs were attacking both Rūdbār and Kūhistān. At Āmid there was a massacre of suspected Ismā'īlis. But the attacks seem to have had no success. On the contrary, in the first years of Buzurg-Ummīd's rule, the Ismā'īlī position in Rūdbār was strengthened. The fortress of Ṭāliqān was taken, then or earlier—this was presumably the strongest place in the Ṭāliqān mountains; and a new fortress, Maimūn-Diz, was built at the border of the Ismā'īlī territory downstream from Alamūt.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, the Ismā'īlis were becoming embroiled on a more local basis. The Bāvandid rulers of Māzandarān, who had refused to join Muḥammad Tapar against Alamūt, had become their active enemy by the time of Maḥmūd's campaign. Then the Ismā'īlis' envoy to Maḥmūd at Iṣfahān had been lynched, and they avenged themselves, not on the Iṣfahānīs, but on the more accessible Qazvīnīs, thus exacerbating an enmity with that city which persisted even when the ruler of 'Irāq-i 'Ajam was inactive. At least some of the Kūhistānī Ismā'īlis were at war with the amīrs of Sīstān with little regard to what arrangements

<sup>1</sup> On the Ismā'īlī territorial pattern, cf. *OA*, pp. 115-16, pp. 244-5. The maps given here supplement the vaguer data there.

<sup>2</sup> The site of Maimūn-Diz has now been identified. See Peter Willey, *The Castles of the Assassins* (London, 1963), pp. 158-92.

## THE ISMĀ'ILĪ STATE

Sanjar might make. The greatest triumph of Buzurg-Ummīd's reign seems to have been the defeat and execution by fire of a Zaidī imām, Abū Hāshim, who had arisen to power in the non-Ismā'ilī districts of Dailam.<sup>1</sup>

When Buzurg-Ummīd died in 532/1138, his son Muḥammad became dā'ī, and, like him, held the allegiance of all the several Ismā'ilī territories. In the earlier part of his reign, at least, he increased the area under the control of Alamūt, seizing some fortresses in the direction of Gilān. But the quarrels with the Ismā'ilīs' neighbours sometimes seemed little more exalted than personal feuds. An amīr of Ray campaigned against them in Rūdbār after his master's assassination, perhaps even despite Sanjar's orders; he built a tower of Ismā'ilī heads. The ruler of Turshīz tried at one point to restore Sunnism there, was expelled, and failed to regain his position even with an army from Sanjar. For at least six years after 545/1150, one of Sanjar's amīrs, Ibn Anaz, carried on an almost personal series of raids in Kūhistān. Perhaps the most disastrous such vendetta for the Ismā'ilīs was the hostility of Shāh Ghāzī of Māzandarān, who built several towers of Ismā'ilī heads gathered from his Rūdbār campaigns, though even he does not seem to have made permanent conquests of land. The raids and counter-raids exchanged with Qazvīn persisted throughout; the Ismā'ilīs' chronicler has recorded the number of sheep taken on each raid.<sup>2</sup>

Though the Nizārīs had made no serious attempt to support the Nizārid cause in Egypt after the schism, bitterness yet remained between the two parties, especially in Syria. Under al-Musta'li's son al-Āmir (personal rule, 515/1121-524/1130), beginning with what was held to be a Nizārī assassination of the vizier al-Afdal, the Nizārī cause seems to have been especially active even in Egypt. The succeeding vizier took extensive measures to guard against a new assassination, allegedly even trying to keep track of any who might be setting out from Alamūt, and at any rate blaming directly on Alamūt the activity of Nizārī agents uncovered. A public defence of al-Āmir's rights as imām, as against those of his uncle Nizār, was deemed necessary. But in 524/1130 al-Āmir was assassinated (again, but more clearly, by Nizārīs); thereupon the Egyptian Ismā'ilīs themselves split. He seems to have had a son in that last year, al-Ṭayyib; but whether because the infant died or because he otherwise disappeared, on al-Āmir's

<sup>1</sup> On Buzurg-Ummīd's reign, see *O.A.*, pp. 99-104.

<sup>2</sup> On Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd's reign, see *O.A.*, pp. 143-6.

death there seemed to be no male heir. After a time of confusion, al-Āmir's cousin (by another uncle) took power as al-Ḥāfiẓ and claimed the imāmate. The main body of Egyptian Ismā'īlīs accepted him, being called Ḥāfiẓiyya; the Ismā'īlīs of the Yemen, the chief body of non-Nizārī Ismā'īlīs outside Egypt, rejected him in the name of al-Ṭayyib, and they became the Ṭayyibīs. Henceforth, though the Nizārīs and Ḥāfiẓīs seem to have had occasional hostile and even friendly relations, the Nizārīs seem to have taken no further account of the Fāṭimid caliphate.<sup>1</sup>

After a spate of assassinations and massacres at the beginning of Muḥammad's reign—these were now limited pretty much to the relatively northerly lands from Kūhistān to Syria, without the involvement of such cities as Baghdad—traces of Ismā'īlī activity in cities away from the Ismā'īlī-ruled territories become few. It is said that under Jahān-Sūz Ghūrī (d. 556/1161) Ismā'īlī propagandists were invited into Ghūr, where his successor had to kill them along with their converts. But even if this is not a case of maliciously mistaken identity, it is not typical of the Ismā'īlī activity of the time. Nevertheless, the Ismā'īlīs continued to maintain a large sense of their mission. The chroniclers of Buzurg-Ummid and his son stressed their acts of generosity—as in the case of a militant enemy amīr whose fortunes at home had changed and who sought refuge with the Ismā'īlīs and was not yielded up to his enemies despite their reminder that previously he had acted treacherously against the Ismā'īlīs. The Ismā'īlīs gloried especially in two acts that seemed to take them on to the world stage again for a moment: the assassinations of the 'Abbāsīd caliphs al-Mustarshid and then of his son, al-Rāshid. Neither caliph was master any longer of a caliphal empire: indeed, both were out of favour with their Saljuq masters, and were either in prison or in exile. Yet the Ismā'īlīs gave their assassins the accolade of *al-'Abbāsī*, victors over the house of 'Abbās, and they even interpreted the necessary exile of al-Rāshid as an expedition by the lord of all Sunnīs against the Ismā'īlīs to avenge his father.

#### *Reactions among the Sunnīs*

By the end of Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummid's reign, the picture of a great life-and-death struggle with the 'Abbāsīd caliphate was as inappropriate to the Ismā'īlī state as it was to the 'Abbāsīd. Yet the

<sup>1</sup> On the later relations with the Fāṭimid Ismā'īlīs, see O.A., pp. 107–10.



Ismā'ili sense of their own grandeur was answered by the Sunnīs' corresponding feeling that they still constituted a major threat to Sunni Muslim society. The impact of the Ismā'ili revolt had been far-reaching and was only then losing its immediacy. Zealous Sunnīs were still inclined to see the Ismā'ilīs as the arch-enemies of Islam.

The first results of the revolt had been, of course, highly disruptive—not only by way of direct Ismā'ili action but also by way of the Sunnīs' panic in response to it, which launched indiscriminate massacres. But apart from immediate political and social consequences, the movement had significant intellectual and imaginative consequences among the Sunnīs which were more enduring. The first question that was raised was what limits should be put to the Sunnī doctrine that membership of the Muslim community should be determined by external acts—notably by acknowledgement of Muḥammad and performance of the *ṣalāt* in the direction of Mecca—while hearts could be judged by God alone. At Iṣfahān those who insisted that the privileges of being a Muslim should be less freely granted had their way when the Ismā'ilīs were excluded despite their external conformity; many later Muslims followed this precedent. This problem as presented in the Ismā'ilīs was also a major one for Ghazālī, who wrote an incisive treatise to resolve it; he then cited that treatise in many other connexions, as fundamental to deciding what sort of intellectual position was and was not compatible with Islam.

But Ghazālī was touched by the Ismā'ili position, and especially by Ḥasan's doctrine of *ta'lim*, more deeply than this. He wrote many works designed to refute the Ismā'ilīs, some of which seem equally designed to settle his own conscience with regard to their challenge. In the *Munqidh min al-ḍallāl* he came to terms with four categories of seekers of the truth, as representative of all the intellectual positions worthy of serious consideration: the philosophers of the Greek tradition; the *mutakallimūn*, taken *en bloc* as those who argue on behalf of historical revelation; the Ṣūfīs with their immediate mystical consciousness—and the Ismā'ilīs with their doctrine of *ta'lim*. To each of the first three groups he allowed a carefully defined role in his total vision of truth-seeking; and though he condemned the Ismā'ilīs roundly, it can be argued that, if not to them, at least to their position he likewise allowed a certain role. He claimed that Muḥammad himself was the true authoritative teacher whose existence, as the Ismā'ilīs showed, reason posited and might verify, but whose teaching it could

not reach by itself. In doing so he not only undercut the Ismā'īlī doctrine but introduced a new approach into the Sunnī doctrine itself: the historical revelation was to be kept central yet was to be tested and interpreted by the inner need of the human being—at its highest, of course, in Šūfī experience. The Ismā'īlī logic helped make possible this integration of history with personal inwardness.

No other Sunnī was so intimately influenced by the Nizārī Ismā'īlī doctrine as was Ghazālī; but few other Sunnī writers were so influential. Other Sunnīs of the time wrestled with the questions raised, but less perceptively. Probably the last to whom the questions were intellectually actual was Shahrestānī (d. 548/1153), who debated with Ismā'ilīs and was more irritated than challenged by them (though he may have used their writings incidentally in his history of doctrine). For later writers, the doctrine of ta'lim was something out of the past—Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī used it to make a debating point against Ghazālī, for instance.

The stimulus to the Muslim imagination was more lasting and has carried over into the Occident. At the time of the revolt itself, the popular reaction came to be an unthinking enraged terror, which created as its objects diabolically clever and ruthless leaders manipulating gullibly stupid followers. The people of Rūdbār were so stupid, it was said, that one of them would saw off the branch he sat on; while Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ was felt to have almost superhuman powers of insight, by which he could win the blind devotion of many skilled individuals and direct them successfully in the most widely ramified and delicate undertakings. The old explanation of Ismā'ilism—that it was invented by a Persian Zoroastrian who resented the Arab victory and wanted to subvert Islam and replace it with dualism, to which doctrine Ismā'ilism would lead—no longer sufficed; it was not dropped, but rather than Islamic doctrine, the Ismā'ilīs' target was now said to be the Muslims themselves: their whole purpose, some believed (as during the panic at Iṣfahān), was to kill as many Muslims as cruelly as possible.

Soon this temper was crystallized into romantic legends. The idea that Ḥasan used drugs to make his human tools more manipulable appeared early in a crude form (walnuts, coriander, and honey to expand the brain). By the time of Marco Polo, the tale was current in Iran that Ḥasan had had a garden made to resemble Paradise, with beautiful maidens at the disposal of the young man who (drugged asleep so as to be transported there unawares) was told (when he awoke a second

time and the garden had vanished) that Ḥasan could send him to that Paradise at will, and would send him there permanently if he died in his service. In Arabic, too, the story turned up in a historical novel set in al-Ḥākim's time, in which the master of the garden was one Ismā'il at Maṣyāf, a subsequent headquarters of the Syrian Nizārīs. It was a Western scholar, Silvestre de Sacy, who later put together the nickname *Ḥashīshīyya* and the notion of the drug, and surmised that the drug was no mere sleeping powder but a vision-engendering narcotic, and that no real garden was necessary. But the garden was too fascinating a theme to be dispensed with, and modern popular lore has retained both the *hashīsh* and the garden.

Other tales were told: at a nightly orgy, males and females would gather and mingle sexually at will with no regard to status or relationship; then the next day, at a word from their master, Ismā'īlī fidā'īs would leap from a turret to their death, for the edification of a visitor. For ordinary Muslims—and for medieval Westerners, whose imaginations proved quite as lurid—the Ismā'īlīs became a dreamworld embodying whatever fascinating horror the sober actuality ruled out from their prosaic lives. But some of the tales seem to have originated with the Ismā'īlīs themselves, notably the tale of the three school-fellows, which FitzGerald retold in his introduction to the *Rubaiyyat*. As the Ismā'īlīs told it, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ was the hero. Since the three students had agreed to share among themselves the good fortune that any of them should achieve, Ḥasan came, as did 'Umar *Khayyām*, to Nizām al-Mulk when he became vizier, expecting his favour. But when Ḥasan, duly established at court, proved much more capable than Nizām al-Mulk, the latter's condescension to his old friend gave way to jealousy, and he plotted to cover the unsuspecting Ḥasan with ignominy and have him disgraced. It was thus the vizier who began the hostility which Ḥasan brought to a conclusion by launching the revolt and getting the vizier assassinated in revenge. The efforts of Sunnī versions to whitewash the vizier were only partly successful, but the story was so appealing that it continued to circulate nonetheless. In the realm of the imagination, the Ismā'īlī inspiration, direct or indirect, ruled unchallenged even after their political power disappeared.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the imaginative and intellectual repercussions among the Sunnis, see *O.A.*, pp. 121-39.

## THE CONTINUING VITALITY OF THE ISMĀ'ILĪS

### *The continuing vitality of the Ismā'ilīs*

Indeed, the Ismā'ilī imaginative power may have contributed to the unwonted vitality which the Ismā'ilī state continued to show even in its reduced form. That vitality is already exhibited in its very survival. In the Islamic society of that age, when so much in the political sphere depended on direct military power, the authority of a government did not normally extend beyond the range of its armies. The five parcels that went to make up the Ismā'ilī state could obviously not be controlled militarily from any one centre; its unity could in no way be enforced. Nor were the Ismā'ilīs of one area able to send much material assistance to another area; there was no immediate profit to be gained from the unity. Yet the state remained one; the governors of Kūhistān and of Syria were regularly appointed by the authority at Alamūt until Alamūt itself fell, despite drastic changes of policy which some of the rulers of Alamūt were to institute. Surely it was a common vision as much as mutual service that kept those widely dispersed territories together for five generations.

The vitality of the state is also attested by the stability of its dynasty. There seem to have been no succession disputes, either at first when it was a dā'ī who ruled, or later when the imāmate was at stake. Twenty years is a relatively long reign in a Muslim dynasty where the effective power is vested in the ruler; but of the seven reigns at Alamūt (the eighth was cut short by the Mongols), four are longer than that: twenty-four, thirty-four, thirty-four, and even forty-four years. Two rulers were murdered (and just possibly a third); one of them after a peculiarly drastic change of policy, the other after his personality showed signs of deterioration—he was the only ruler of the seven who was not fully competent personally (and even he may have been blackened posthumously). The rulers were supported by a vigorous and independent community life in each of the Ismā'ilī districts, and though they could initiate extreme changes of policy they were not allowed to grow soft.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the small extent and limited economy of the state, it retained a disproportionate power: repeatedly the Ismā'ilīs were able to expand beyond their holdings, and their diplomacy often ranged far and effectively—at more than one period they were respectfully listened to as far away as in the courts of Western Europe. To the

<sup>1</sup> On the stability of the state, see *O.A.*, pp. 115–20, 244–6.

Sunnīs, their power seemed greater than it really was: the continuing intense hatred for the Ismā'īlis, which finally led Sunnīs to call the Mongols down on them when no Muslim power seemed capable of defeating them, bears witness to the Ismā'īlī reputation. It has been suggested that this power was based on the weapon of assassination. Doubtless that played a role; but the Ismā'īlis were by no means the only ones who resorted to assassination, nor could such a weapon have been systematically effective over many generations unless it were backed up by strong institutions.

The Ismā'īlī society was not a typical mountaineer and small-town society, despite the counting of sheep after raids. Each community maintained its own sense of initiative in the framework of the wider cause, and probably a sense of larger strategy was never completely absent: the immediate consequence everywhere of changes in their overall external policy suggest this. But what was most distinctive was the high level of intellectual life. The prominent early Ismā'īlis were commonly known as scholars, often as astronomers, and at least some later Ismā'īlis continued the tradition. In Alamūt, in Kūhistān, and in Syria, at the main centres at least, were libraries which included Qur'āns and religious literature of all sorts, but also scientific books and equipment; visitors were impressed with the libraries, which were well known among Sunnī scholars. To the end the Ismā'īlis prized sophisticated interpretations of their own doctrines, and were also interested in every kind of knowledge which the age could offer.

The vitality of their community was reinforced by the continuing arrival of a certain number of outsiders into the Ismā'īlī centres. We hear of few Ismā'īlis coming in from outside; after the time of Buzurg-Ummīd the Ismā'īlis of the diaspōra would not have been sufficiently numerous to help much, either in supporting Ismā'īlī external policies or in revitalizing the isolated communities. Yet the Ismā'īlis did challenge the imagination and were able to attract individuals of high calibre. Some of these were political refugees—amīrs who had lost out in quarrels within the Sunnī world and who knew the Ismā'īlis would never give them up to their enemies. Some were adventurous youths who adopted Ismā'īlism, such as Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, who later became head of the Syrian Ismā'īlis; he seems to have been brought up in a Nuṣairī community in Iraq, and to have gone to Alamūt when he wanted to get away from home. Finally, in the later period, there were a number of outside scholars attracted to the Ismā'īlī libraries

## THE CONTINUING VITALITY OF THE ISMĀ'ILĪS

and to their generous patronage of learning; most of them seem to have remained frankly non-Ismā'ili, but they helped maintain the high intellectual tone of the community. The greatest of them, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, even wrote major Ismā'ili treatises.

Accordingly, we must attribute the Ismā'ili strength only in part to their military methods or to the political genius of their early leaders, and to the irrationally persistent reputation which the later generations retained. In large part it resulted from the solidarity they could maintain among themselves under outside pressure; from their ability to renew a social and religious tradition which encouraged their continued independence; and from the special appeal they made, in the contemporary Muslim society, to the exceptional individual.

### III. RESURRECTION

Theological doctrines usually serve as a criticism and discipline of religious practice, warning of pitfalls to be avoided in terms of a given tradition. But sometimes they can form a positive charter for spiritual renewal, as was now to be the case. Doctrines cannot really describe such a renewal, but the nature of its spiritual life can be deduced from them. By the shifts they make in terminology and emphasis, and in particular by the points which prove crucial at moments of polemic with other viewpoints, they indicate what sorts of mood, insight, aspiration, and commitment are to be legitimized and given social encouragement. We know the next stage of the Ismā'ili community life almost exclusively through its theological production; from this we must try to deduce the life of the time. But such a procedure is not entirely inappropriate. Theological doctrines are especially important in a community like that of the Nizārī Ismā'ilīs, which depended so much on a continual revitalizing of their distinctive group orientation.

#### *Hasan II: sublimation of expectations*

In the later years of Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd, there was a movement among the younger Ismā'ilīs to revive what had always been a popular doctrine in Ismā'ili circles, though it had been suppressed by the Ismā'ili leadership: the doctrine that the sharī'a ritual law no longer applied to those who understood the bāṭin, the inner meaning of it, for the sharī'a was simply a set of symbols intended to

incite to more understanding beyond itself, and when it had fulfilled its function it was no longer binding. Those who believed this had seen the imposition of sharī'a on enlightened and devoted Ismā'īlis as a kind of taqiyya, or dissimulation designed only to help keep the ignorant, wilful Sunnis in place—lest they follow the free Ismā'īlis' example prematurely and, without even the symbols of truth to restrain them, give rein to their evil natures and cast aside all law and order altogether. In any case, at the end of the age, when the imām established full justice in the world—an eschatological time which many Ismā'īlis identified with the Last Judgment and the coming of Paradise—the sharī'a would be abolished, for it would no longer be relevant when the imperfect conditions of the present life were past. But many Ismā'īlis were restive, at least in their private lives, at waiting for the grand consummation. During the active revolt the Ismā'īli puritanism had been accentuated as all energies were focused on the immediate goal of material victory. But now it would seem that in their own districts, set apart from the Sunnī world, the Ismā'īlis no longer had any responsibility to set a cautious example to the Sunnis. Why shouldn't the Ismā'īlis assume their rightful freedom from the petty restrictions of the sharī'a and live in full recognition of the spiritual truths of their faith, which preoccupation with the sharī'a ritual tended to obscure?

When Muḥammad found that among the young men who inclined to this viewpoint was his own son Ḥasan, who was expected to succeed him as dā'ī, he took drastic action. It is said that Ḥasan drank wine in secret to show that he was above the law, and that some of the Ismā'īlis took this to be a sign that he was the true imām. Muḥammad had 250 men killed and exiled 250 more, and Ḥasan denied publicly that he was the imām; apparently from that time till Muḥammad's death Ḥasan curbed his tongue. But Ḥasan had read widely not only in the older books of the Ismā'īlis but also in philosophic and Sūfī writings. He seems to have learned to interpret the old Ismā'īli hopes in the light of Sūfī psychological insights. He is said to have been very affable and popular in Rūdbār, where he was regarded as more learned than his father; on his father's death (557/1162) he succeeded without dispute and proceeded to prepare the way, cautiously, for a reform. After two years he was ready.<sup>1</sup>

On 17 Ramaḍān 559/1164 he gathered together at Alamūt representatives from the various dispersed Ismā'īli groups, at least those in

<sup>1</sup> On Ḥasan II's youth, see *OA*, pp. 146–8.

## ḤASAN II: SUBLIMATION OF EXPECTATIONS

Iran (the Syrians are not mentioned, and the new dispensation may not have been fully introduced to them till later). He read them a message supposed to be from the imām, naming Ḥasan as the imām's special representative with plenary authority, entitling him not only *dā'ī* but also *ḥujja*, proof of the imām (like Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ), and finally caliph, representative of the imām, presumably a higher rank yet. At last the imām was emerging. But he announced yet more: the long-foretold Last Day had arrived—*qiyāma*, the Resurrection—when all mankind would be judged and committed forever to either Hell or Paradise; henceforth those who refused to accept the imām were cast into Hell, which was spiritual non-existence, while those who accepted him were in Paradise. Finally, as was fitting in Paradise, *taqiyya* was no longer necessary and the *shari'ā* was at an end. Accordingly, the fast of Ramaḍān (which in the *bāṭin* had been held to stand for *taqiyya*) was broken with a feast then and there. Toward the time of the *hajj* pilgrimage, a similar ceremony was held at the fortress Mu'minābād in Kūhistān, where Ḥasan's position as caliph was explicitly identified with that of the Fāṭimid caliph al-Mustaṣṣir—who had in fact been imām.<sup>1</sup>

The great resurrection, the end of the world, was thus understood (in a typically Ismā'īlī manner) in a symbolic sense. It was the end of a religious era, and the beginning of a spiritual dispensation of moral, not physical, perfection. The end of earthly life, of the external level of reality, at least as possessing religious significance, and also the end of the *shari'ā* law, was the moment when the inward meaning of reality became evident and what mattered henceforth would be a purely spiritual life of inward states of the soul. The event may be compared with the advent of the dispensation of grace and the end of the dispensation of the law as Paul presented them. More properly, it must be interpreted in Ṣūfī terms: the inner life of moral and mystical experience was the sole reality henceforth to be attended to. Those who could respond were, spiritually, already in eternal life, and those who could not were spiritually lifeless. This was the long-awaited culmination; the faithful Ismā'īlīs who understood were to leave behind all material compromise and rise to the spiritual level which was the only true victory; that is, they were to become spiritually perfect; while the Sunnis were defeated in the most final sense possible, in that all their

<sup>1</sup> On the declaration of *qiyāma*, see *OA*, pp. 148–58. The chief sources are Raṣhīd al-Dīn, Juvainī, and *Haft Bāb-i Abī Lṣḥāq*. The latter is to be found in *Kalām-i Pir*, ed. W. Ivanow (Bombay, 1935), as indicated by Ivanow in an appendix.



further efforts were rendered spiritually meaningless. Thus was established the doctrine of the qiyāma, the Resurrection, as the new basis of Ismā'īlī life.

From one point of view, Ḥasan's proclamation was the natural fulfilment of Ismā'īlī hopes. But it raised serious difficulties, covered over for the time being by the enthusiasm of the reform and the personal popularity of Ḥasan himself. The dominant moral tone of Nizārī Ismā'īlism had been a rigorous moral purism founded on the sharī'a as such; the doctrine of the qiyāma made a radical reversal in this. The reversal was not merely permissive: Ḥasan seems to have insisted that the Ismā'īlīs must all live according to the new dispensation, in inward spiritual alertness and without the law, just as previously they all had to live according to the old legalistic dispensation. Some persons are said to have emigrated rather than comply. Then the doctrine of the qiyāma itself presented difficulties: though Ismā'īlīs might be willing to find that the new heaven and the new earth were not geophysically new but only spiritually new, yet it had been supposed that the eschatological event would still produce a drastic transformation at least of all human society. The first moment was doubtless exhilarating; perfection often does seem within reach at the moment of revolution. But the Ismā'īlīs had yet to learn to live with the implications of the new doctrine.

#### *Muḥammad II: formulation of the doctrine*

Ḥasan did not live to solve the problems. A year and a half after the declaration of the Resurrection, he was murdered by a brother-in-law, a partisan of the sharī'a. However, his nineteen-year-old son Muḥammad succeeded to his position, reaffirmed Ḥasan's policies, and devoted his life to elaborating the doctrine of the qiyāma in numerous treatises.

The doctrine of the qiyāma effectively replaced the doctrine of ta'lim as central in the theory of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs. Each of these doctrines carried one aspect of older Ismā'īlī teaching to its extreme: as the doctrine of ta'lim exalted the lone authority of the imām, so that of the qiyāma exalted the lone validity of the bāṭin. The doctrine of the qiyāma was even more extreme than that of ta'lim and presented a contrasting temper, substituting high personal consciousness for group rigorism. It was surely facilitated by the legacy of radical Ismā'īlī ideas which had always been present among Ismā'īlīs (sometimes

transformed into folklore), and which might be expected to come to the fore in out-of-the-way areas when the discipline of city-bred scholars was relaxed. In the case of the Syrian Ismā'īlis, at least, we have good evidence that such radical ideas, taking popular form, did prevail. Notions of reincarnation and even of transmigration, rejected by most official Ismā'īlī teachers, had long been associated with extreme emphasis on the *bāṭin*, and now reappeared. But the Ismā'īlis remained sufficiently sophisticated to require a scholarly defence even of popularly appealing ideas.

The first theoretical problem lay in the person of the *imām*. At the *qiyāma*, the great Resurrection, the *imām* must be present in person: it was precisely the role of culminating *imām* (called the *qā'im*) to usher in the *qiyāma*, for which all his followers were waiting and to which the other *imāms* were but as links in a chain. Indeed, if *taqiyya* was lifted, if the *bāṭin* became evident and the inner secrets were revealed, the first of those was precisely the identity of the *imām* and his true position. Where then was the *imām*? It would seem that before the end of his life Ḥasan II had hinted that he was himself not merely the caliph, representative of the *imām*, but the *imām* himself. But the *imām* ought to be a direct descendant of 'Alī and in particular of Nizār, which Buzurg-Ummīd, Ḥasan's grandfather, certainly had not been. Probably Ḥasan maintained that he was *imām* in the *bāṭin*, to which the external descent in the flesh would be indifferent. Muḥammad II took the step of announcing that Ḥasan had been *imām* according to physical descent also; and thus Muḥammad II likewise, being his son, was *imām*. The story which he seems to have sponsored was that Ḥasan was not the son of Muḥammad b. Buzurg-Ummīd but of a descendant of Nizār who had in fact been hidden in Alamūt just as the outside tales had had it. Either the babies had been interchanged or the *imām* (not bound to the law) had actually slept with the *dā'ī's* wife. In any case, the Nizārīd line of *imāms* had appeared and was acting on its own authority in Alamūt. If one believed that the *qiyāma* was valid to begin with, some such conclusion followed almost necessarily in the ingrown community and the particular way chosen to show how it could have happened was perhaps of secondary consequence.

The second theoretical problem lay in the *qiyāma* itself. The great Resurrection, even if merely regarded as a turning-point in human history and not as a geophysical epoch, was still expected to be a time of evident wonders in which the faithful would triumph and their opponents

disappear. The dead were to be raised, nature was to be purified, no labour was henceforth to be needed, no sin could be committed, all was to be well. Indeed, personal spiritual perfection was sufficiently wondrous already, that the wonders and the transformations of the world at large could readily enough be rendered at such a moment into symbolic terms; thus the "world" of the Ismā'īlī religious organization came to an end with the ending of the old system of rankings and their hierarchy (which must have been inappropriate to the isolated communities anyway); at the Resurrection all the faithful were equal in the realm of religion. But the imām's appearance had led, still less than in the early Fāṭimid period, to a visible triumph over the Sunnī world. The Resurrection was the moment when Hell and Paradise were no longer distant possibilities but immediate actualities. To justify the high claims, it could be said that the Sunnīs had been resurrected in that they had been offered the opportunity—which Ismā'ilism had not offered before—not merely of a high promise and meanwhile a deeper insight, but of the immediate, perfected living of the life of the spirit unencumbered by *shari'a*; and in the Sunnīs' refusal they had *ipso facto* been judged and condemned to a spiritual non-existence that was all the more absolute the more complete was the spiritual reality offered them. But the doctrine of the qiyāma introduced a further element which distinguished the Ismā'ilīs from the Sunnīs more graphically: the figure of the imām-qā'im.

Turning back to various religious traditions of the Islamic region, Muḥammad II pointed to a darkly known figure, the eternally living man Elijah, who had been swept up to heaven, and Enoch, and, in a more strictly Islamic context, *Khiḍr*, the Qur'ānic figure whose literary ancestry went back not only to Elijah but to Utnapishtim in the Gilgamesh epic and to Alexander's cook, who had drunk of the water of life and would live forever. *Khiḍr* had been adopted by the Ṣūfīs as an eternally wandering mystic, ready to bring material and spiritual sustenance to lonely dedicated Ṣūfīs in their hour of extremest need. Among some Christians Melchizedec, the priest forever whom Abraham honoured and who was a type of Christ, had likewise captured the imagination. This ever-living, recurrently reappearing figure of unlimited wisdom and irresistible authority had always been at best marginal to the Sunnī world, mysterious and inaccessible. Muḥammad II now identified with that figure the imām-qā'im, the special imām who was master of the qiyāma.

## MUḤAMMAD II: FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE

Some Ismā'īlis (and not only Ismā'īlis among the Shī'īs) had always been inclined to exalt 'Alī over Muḥammad, the imām over the prophet, on the ground that the inward meaning of external symbols (the meaning that 'Alī was charged with teaching) was of higher status than the external symbols themselves (which Muḥammad had brought). Until now, however, such a doctrine was not admitted officially among the Ismā'īlis, perhaps lest it undermine the status of the sharī'a. Muḥammad II now adopted it, and, by identifying 'Alī as a figure with Melchizedec and Khiḍr-Elijah, he endowed the newly exalted imām with all the potency of their tradition. What had happened in the qiyāma, then, was much more than any mere conquest of the Sunnī world might have been, an event already foreshadowed in the time of the Fāṭimids. Into a different world, the elusive world of Khiḍr-Elijah, which the Sunnis only glimpsed in fragments of legend or occasional momentary experiences of Ṣūfis, the Ismā'īlis had been admitted in full and permanently. It was as if Dailam and Kūhistān had been wrapt, like Elijah himself, and carried out of sight of the Sunnis, and their inhabitants were privileged to walk, as on everyday ground, the sacred soil upon which Moses removed his shoes to tread, when, in the incident of the burning bush, God spoke to him through Melchizedec, the imām-qā'im of his time.<sup>1</sup>

### *Ismā'īlism and Ṣūfism*

It is not easy to estimate what all this could mean, substantively and psychologically. For some, transcendence of ordinary life by way of symbolism was probably quite enough. At the very least, the qiyāma meant the declaration of the Ismā'īlis' psychological independence from the world outside, an independence in some ways quite real once the wider revolt was abandoned; and this abandonment was likewise symbolized in the qiyāma, in that it declared the Sunnī world irrelevant. For others, the qiyāma could mean a personal transformation. This was summed up in the doctrine that the perfected faithful should no longer see anything but the imām, and God in the imām.

The great boon of Paradise, according to Muslim tradition, was

<sup>1</sup> On the doctrine of the qiyāma under Muḥammad II, see *O.A.*, pp. 160–80. The chief sources are: the *Haft Bāb-i Abī Ishāq*, just cited; the *Haft Bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*, in W. Ivanow, *Two Early Ismaili Treatises*, Islamic Research Association Series 11 (Bombay, 1933); and Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī's *Rawḍat al-taslīm*, ed. W. Ivanow: *Taṣawwūrāt*, Ismaili Society Series B, vol. vii (Leiden, 1952).

that there one could see God face to face. In the Paradise of the *qiyāma*, the locus of divinity was the *imām*, now reinterpreted as the Elijah-*Khidr*-Melchizedec figure. The *imām* was God made visible. To see the *imām* was to see God—and it was in this seeing that Paradise essentially consisted, not in being in *Rūdbār* or in *Kūhistān*. But to see the *imām* was a matter of viewpoint. To see just the body of the *imām* (which might, moreover, appear to have its imperfections) was useless: one had to see him in his spiritual reality. If one saw the *imām*, i.e. understood and concentrated on him in his spiritual reality, then all else that one saw and did would follow from that—one would see the whole world from his viewpoint and no longer from one's own personal vantage-point at all: one would see the *imām* only and not oneself, as they put it. Thus one would live the totally enlightened and spiritual life which was the afterlife the *Ismā'ilis* had expected—and it would make no difference whether this was in the body or not. Accordingly, in the *qiyāma* the faithful were summoned not to the worship of God, which was their own imperfect activity, but to God Himself, now present in the *imām*, in Whom their own selves no longer mattered.

The *imām*, then, was to serve for the *Ismā'ilis* as a *Ṣūfī pīr* sometimes did for his disciples. They were to cultivate their own divine awareness by focusing their attention on him, seeing the divine presence hidden within him, and forgetting their separate selves. But the *imām* was more than a *Ṣūfī pīr*. Muḥammad II is reported to have written his discourses in the language of the philosophers, and certainly he made use also of the *Ismā'ili* tradition. The doctrine of the *qiyāma* and its discipline formed a new synthesis among traditions. The *imām* was not simply one experienced *Ṣūfī* teacher among many, who might be the object of a transference process in those disciples who chose to explore their inward selves under his guidance. Beyond that, he was felt to be a unique, single cosmic individual who summed up in his position the whole reality of existence; the perfect microcosm, for whom no lesser *pīr* could be substituted. In him the faithful found not only a guide to personal awareness but also the embodiment of a whole symbolic system in terms of which he could place himself in the whole cosmos.

This new sense of the cosmos into which the deepening sense of self-awareness fitted was described in *Ismā'ili* terms as a third level of being, in effect a *bāṭin* behind the *bāṭin*. This third level, that of ultimate reality, went beyond the old *Ismā'ili* interpretations of the *sharī'a* as

these had gone beyond the *sharī'a* itself. On that level all things were one in the imām. Only personal relations counted, for only persons had an inward, spiritual life; and even persons, when perfect, were merged into their idealized roles as expressions of cosmic harmony. Every imām, when seen rightly, was seen to be 'Alī; every disciple was again Salmān, the faithful disciple of Muḥammad and adherent of 'Alī. The accidents of space and time did not matter. On this level not only the arbitrary rules of the *sharī'a* were pointless, but even the hierarchically organized discipline of the Ismā'īlī organization in the time of taqīyya. The qiyāma was a declaration of spiritual adulthood, in which all rules and discipline were outgrown and the individual acted directly from his inmost self—which was at one with all the rest of existence in the present and revealed imām.

Even this cosmic aspect of the qiyāma doctrine contained much that was analogous to the doctrines of cosmic unity professed by the Šūfis of that time and especially later. The cosmic position of the imām was very like that of the Perfect Man, who is the microcosm, i.e. the final end of creation in that God brings the world to full consciousness of Himself through that saint. But such general and abstract teachings about an invisible Perfect Man, or *quṭb* among the Šūfis, could not offer a full equivalent of the sense of joint spiritual experience which the Ismā'īlīs seem to have shared in the presence of their quite visible and present one true imām, who was at once pīr and quṭb.

On the whole, the doctrine of the qiyāma seems to have had far less impact on the Sunnī world than did Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ's doctrine of ta'lim. Until the time of Juvainī, writing after the fall of Alamūt, the Sunnī chroniclers and theologians seem scarcely to have been aware of it. To be sure, if it had any effect it would have been among the Šūfis, to whose ideas the doctrine was most congenial, and who travelled widely and were commonly receptive to new ideas; and movements of thought among the Šūfis were little chronicled by the standard authors unless they caused special scandal. The Sunnī Šūfī doctrines of cosmic unity and of the Perfect Man, in fact, were brought to full flower only by Ibn 'Arabī, who was eighteen years the junior of Muḥammad II. But such ideas were already developing in Šūfī circles. Ibn 'Arabī, indeed, made use of Ismā'īlī concepts and terms, but presumably not of the doctrine of the qiyāma. Rather, it was the earlier forms of such doctrines among the Šūfis which will have served as suggestions to Ḥasan II and Muḥammad II.

What is more likely is that the doctrine of the *qiyāma* may have influenced later *Shī'ī* thinking. If there is one person in Twelver *Shī'ī* history who answers to *Ghazālī* among the Sunnīs as legitimizer of philosophy and mysticism, it is *Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī*, the leading figure in *Shī'ism* at the time of its revival in the thirteenth century. He was one of the earliest within the Twelver community of a synthesis of the *Šūfī* experience developed among Sunnīs with a strongly *Shī'ī* attitude on the *imāmate*—a synthesis which was later made yet more explicit, with the *imām* in the role of Perfect Man, and became a primary basis for *Shī'ī* thought under the *Šafavids*. But *Ṭūsī* himself in his earlier years lived among the *Ismā'īlīs* and wrote works of theology for them, expounding the doctrine of the *qiyāma* in a slightly later form, when the *imām* was again technically hidden (as he was to the Twelvers). It seems likely that later Twelvers did not need the *Ismā'īlī* example to suggest to them the possibility of such a synthesis, but in fact that example was present in the most intimate way to one of the Twelver *Shī'īs'* first and greatest expounders of *Šūfism*.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the *qiyāma* laid the foundation for the ultimate identification of *Nizārī Ismā'ilism* as a *Šūfī ʿarīqa*, which was the guise it appeared in after the fall of *Alamūt*. In the time of the *qiyāma*, the *Ismā'īlīs* remained consciously opposed to *Šūfism* as such, yet already they found it convenient to borrow *Šūfī* terminology. Later, when a new *taqiyya* was necessary after their state could no longer protect them from *Sunnī* wrath, the protean forms of *Šūfism* were easily available to them with almost no alteration in their own ways.

### *The Resurrection within history*

Among the *Ismā'īlīs* the *qiyāma* meant, along with independence from the *Sunnī* world and its opinion, an admission of their failure in the attempt to transform that world. The attempt to rival *Sunnism* within that world came to an end with the revolt itself. From the viewpoint of both *Sunnīs* and Twelver *Shī'īs*, however, what mattered was not the end of the revolt as such, which might have made for easier relations, for in any case hostilities continued on both sides. For them the great

<sup>1</sup> Henry Corbin has studied closely the relations among *Shī'ism*, *Ismā'ilism*, and *Šūfism*. In his *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1964), see especially pp. 47–50; but all of Parts I and II are highly relevant. He discusses the doctrine of the *qiyāma* quite soundly and perceptively (pp. 137–51), though with almost no regard to its historical conditions and development.

fact was that the sharī'a was abolished. In the time of Aḥmad-i 'Aṭṭāsh (494/1100) it could be debated whether the Ismā'ilīs were Muslims, entitled to the privileges and immunities of membership in the Muslim community. At that time the Ismā'ilīs' chief plea was that they kept the Muslim sharī'a law and differed from other Muslims only on the question of the imāmate. But now, for those who chose to notice at all the changes within the Ismā'ilī society, the worst suspicions of the Ismā'ilīs' opponents were confirmed. Rejecting the sharī'a, the Ismā'ilīs put themselves beyond the pale of Islam by any obvious standard: variations in the sharī'a could be tolerated, but now the Ismā'ilīs were no longer even "people of the Qibla", who performed worship (as prescribed by the sharī'a) in the direction of Mecca. Thus they failed the minimal test of adherence to Muḥammad's mission.

Technically, Paradise was not in history. On the level of ultimate reality, in the doctrine of the qiyāma, only the type, i.e. the role that persons played in the eternal drama with the imām, was real; not the dated and placed individual event. As the faithful was always Salmān, so he who rejected the summons was forever 'Umar, banished from Paradise and so in reality non-existent. Yet already in the time of Ḥasan II warfare with the outsiders seems to have flared up more intensely than it had for some years—warfare waged on a lower level than that of ultimate reality, but necessary in its own way. Ibn Anaz continued his raids in Kūhistān. More significantly, the Rūdbārīs intensified their quarrel with Qazvin after a lapse of years without much raiding; building a fortress just outside the city, we are told, they harassed it almost to the point of siege (560/1165).

In the first half of the reign of Muḥammad II, however, the Ismā'ilīs were relatively at peace with their neighbours; or at least we hear little of warfare in either Sunnī or Ismā'ilī chronicles. A ruler of Rūyān, at odds with the local gentry and with his superior, the ruler of Māzandarān, fled to the Ismā'ilīs for refuge and with their help carried out some raids—in which he was worsted. But for the most part little of headline note happened among the Iranian Ismā'ilīs. In Syria it was the time of the Muslim struggle to oust the Crusaders, of Nūr al-Dīn and Saladin. There the Ismā'ilīs were under the leadership of Rāshid al-Dīn Sinān, a companion of Ḥasan II who seems to have been sent there to introduce the doctrine of the qiyāma. He was occupied in consolidating the independence of the Ismā'ilī fortresses, which straddled the line between Muslims and Franks, and also in establishing



their relations with their several neighbours. He seems to have interpreted the *qiyāma* in his own way, perhaps with relatively little reference to Muḥammad II, and to have managed a quite personal foreign policy in his very limited territory. There was a rumour that Alamūt would have liked to be rid of him. Nonetheless, at his death there was no question of the succession: Alamūt appointed the chief in Syria as elsewhere.

In the last sixteen years or so of Muḥammad II's reign—after Sinān's death (588/1193), that is—we hear increasingly of petty warfare in which the Ismā'īlīs were often on the defensive. The Kūhistānīs had trouble with the rulers of Sistān to the south and then with the rulers of Ghūr (the great Ghūrid dynasty that overwhelmed the Ghaznavids), who delighted in destroying any Ismā'īlīs whom they might chance to discover in their path. The Ismā'īlīs were reduced to making humble terms with the Ghūrid Ghiyāth al-Dīn, when he was setting about conquering Khurāsān; and when his brother began attacking them all over again, they had to beg Ghiyāth al-Dīn to intervene with him in their favour. Rūdbār had trouble again with Māzandarān, supporting a rebel ruler of Rūyān—evidently with such success that the Ismā'īlīs were granted some villages as a reward. Then the Khwārazmians established themselves as the partisans of Qazvīn against the Ismā'īlīs, taking the place of the Saljuqs; but their activities were relatively minor and at least partly defensive. Though the Ismā'īlīs of Rūdbār could still undertake daring ventures, one gets the impression that many Ismā'īlīs had grown used to peace and did not care for interruptions of their commercial activity. Occasionally assassination was still used, but in one case, the assassination of the Ghūrid Shihāb al-Dīn, the Ismā'īlīs laid claim to an act which may well not have been their own—and did so as a pretext for winning favour with the rising Khwārazmian power, enemy of the Ghūrids. Even the vigour of Rūdbār could be turned to winning tributary villages in alliance with a Sunnī ruler. Politically the Ismā'īlī situation carried little glamour.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV. ACCOMMODATION

The great revolt, after it was contained, was followed by a period in which the Ismā'īlīs, even while retaining the doctrines and viewpoints of the revolt itself, in fact were defending a limited territorial state

<sup>1</sup> On Ḥasan II's reign, see *O.A.*, pp. 157–9; on Muḥammad II's reign, pp. 182–4, 210–14; on Sinān, pp. 185–209.

### ḤASAN III: RECOGNITION OF SUNNISM

against its neighbours. Such ideals were at odds with such a practice. The high sense of mission the Ismā'īlis retained had led finally to the proclamation of the spiritual Resurrection and to the whole inward-turning discipline of the qiyāma, in which they tried to raise their own little society to the highest conceivable level of human realization and relegated the rest of the world to insignificance. But again the bold effort was checked, though again not fully defeated. The outer world refused to remain insignificant; but what was more important, for an effort aimed at inner perfection rather than outer empire, the effort faltered internally. It failed in the person of the imām himself; but not only in him.

In the fourth and last phase of the Ismā'īli state, the Ismā'īlis retained the ideal of perfection but restricted it to a limited spiritual sphere and in fact were working out an accommodation, both inward and external, with its human and historical limitations. The rising generation wanted peace and normalcy. After some hesitation they did not wholly reject (as did their imām for himself) the ideal of the qiyāma; but they adapted it to a more limited estimate of the human condition. Then they supplemented its crippled inward grandeur with revived political ambition: ambition both within the Sunnī world and even beyond it, not hesitating to dream of material world domination. Thus the sense of mission persisted, if anything growing more comprehensive as the Ismā'īli state itself grew weaker.

#### *Ḥasan III: recognition of Sunnism*

The shift of phase was more unmistakably marked at the end of the time of the qiyāma than it had been at the end of the active revolt. That the death of Muḥammad Tāpar and the abandonment of Shīrgīr's siege of Alamūt would be the end of generalized military involvement became evident only in the years that followed. The end of the effort for perfection in the qiyāma was announced as abruptly as had been the qiyāma itself.

Muḥammad II's son Ḥasan did not like the Ismā'īli isolation and rejected the doctrine of the qiyāma. Relations between father and son were strained during Muḥammad's last years, and it is said they each went in mortal fear of the other; but there is no reason to suppose, as some later claimed, that Muḥammad was murdered when he died at a ripe age (607/1210). In any case, Ḥasan III's accession was well

prepared. From an Ismā'īlī point of view he was undeniably the imām: he had received the irrevocable designation by the preceding imām and whatever he ordered was to be received in faith. At the same time, Ḥasan had written to a number of Sunnī rulers assuring them that he abjured Ismā'ilism and intended to lead his flock into the fold of Sunnī Islam. Accordingly, his accession was accepted by the Ismā'ilīs and acclaimed by the Sunnīs too. Many Sunnī rulers were glad to receive by conversion the dread enemy whom they had never been able to overcome by conquest. Ḥasan's rights to the territory which the Ismā'ilīs happened to hold were acknowledged, and he was accepted as a Sunnī amīr among other amīrs.

This did not happen without effort, however. Ḥasan's mother, said to have been a Sunnī from the first, went on pilgrimage to Mecca under the patronage of the Caliph al-Nāṣir and received an honoured place in the Baghdad caravan. At Mecca the pilgrims from Syria challenged the honour paid to her, and so to the ex-Ismā'ilīs, and a fracas ensued. But Ḥasan did his best to convince everyone that the community was really reformed and had readopted the sharī'a—this time, the Sunnī sharī'a, not the Shī'ī sharī'a which Ḥasan's grandfather had done away with. He had every village build a proper mosque and also a bath, to prove its status as a full-fledged centre of normal Muslim life; we know that this was done at least in some places in Syria. He imported Sunnī scholars (of the Shāfi'ī school) and insisted that all his people obey them. The Qazvinīs naturally remained sceptical, recalling the Ismā'īlī propensity to taqiyya, or dissimulation of their true religious position; he allowed their religious scholars to come up into Alamūt and burn whatever they disliked of the books in the famous library—a procedure which, like many men of religion, they found much to their taste and which seems to have won them over. Thus from chief of an execrated and increasingly marginal sect, Ḥasan made himself into a celebrated hero, whose actions reverberated throughout the Islamic lands. What remained unchanged was that his repute and the role he could play still waxed far out of proportion to the material resources of his little state.

All the Ismā'īlī territories seem to have obeyed Ḥasan's orders without any question. Whether he laid claim to the dignity publicly or not, he was still the imām: indeed, he never renounced the power which was based on that position, even though he denounced the position that had brought him the power. Ḥasan himself was almost certainly

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sincere in his adoption of Sunnism. His people, however, almost certainly regarded his action as a reimposition of *taqiyya*; and, given the extensive meaning that had been assigned to *taqiyya* by implication when its lifting was decreed at the *qiyāma*, this could imply any sort of accommodation with the world, even to the concealment, doctrinally, of the person of the *imām*. In fact, the adoption of the Sunnī *shari'a* brought immediate tactical advantages in both Kūhistān and Syria, though Rūdbār had been less threatened and now benefited less politically. In Kūhistān, the Ghūrid attacks were effectively ended. In Syria the Ismā'ilīs had just got into serious trouble with the Franks and now received opportune assistance from Aleppo. The Ismā'ilīs found occasion to reciprocate the Sunnī friendliness. Toward the end of Ḥasan's reign the Mongol terror swept over much of the Islamic lands, including Khurāsān. Many refugees, and in particular Sunnī scholars, found asylum in the Ismā'ilī towns of Kūhistān (these were relatively less attractive, or less accessible, to the Mongols), and they were given lavish hospitality by the head of the Ismā'ilīs there, himself a scholar.

Ḥasan III's reform was accepted sufficiently by his own people to allow him not only to impose it without recorded disruption in all their territories, but even to leave Rūdbār, accompanied by an Ismā'ilī army, for a couple of years of foreign adventure without losing control at home. When Ḥasan first acceded to power, he had the *khuṭba* recited in the name of the Khwārazm-Shāh, the most potent monarch in Iran at the time and successor to the Saljuqs. However, fairly soon he shifted to the alliance of the Caliph al-Nāṣir, the great opponent of the Khwārazmians. The caliph was in a position to show Ḥasan much honour—as in the pilgrimage of his mother; then Ḥasan wanted to marry into the noble Sunnī houses of Gilān, and the caliph's letters persuaded those nobles to allow their daughters to go to Alamūt. Perhaps even more important, the shift brought with it an alignment with Öz-Beg of Āzarbāijān, an important member of the caliph's alliance. Ḥasan seems to have struck up a real friendship with that other ruler; when they decided to make a joint campaign, Ḥasan went to his court for a long stay to make preparations.

The campaign was a major one. 'Irāq-i 'Ajam was a primary point of contention between the Khwārazm-Shāh and the caliphal alliance. The Āzarbāijānī forces had succeeded in gaining control of the greater part of it, but then Mengli, Öz-Beg's lieutenant there, made

himself independent and threatened seriously to weaken the alliance. The caliph persuaded troops to come from as far away as Syria to help Öz-Beg, but Ḥasan's help seems to have been reckoned of considerable importance. Öz-Beg subsidized Ḥasan substantially, and after the victory (which was not a very brilliant one, though immediately effective enough), Ḥasan was given Abhar and Zanjān. Thus the Ismā'ili state was expanding more decisively than in its whole history since the revolt—not through either settlement or conversion, but simply by annexing tribute-paying dependent territory. Ḥasan seems to have lost that territory later, presumably to the Khwārazmians.

After the campaign, Ḥasan retired to Rūdbār and stayed there. When Öz-Beg's next lieutenant in 'Irāq-i 'Ajam also broke with him and went over to the Khwārazm-Shāh, there was no great campaign; rather, at the caliph's bidding, Ḥasan sent Ismā'ili fidā'is, who assassinated him. Ḥasan seems not to have been very venturesome by nature, despite his one fling, and he looked well to the constellation of forces around him: he was the first Iranian ruler to submit to the Mongols after they crossed the Oxus. After an otherwise undistinguished reign of eleven years, he died of dysentery while still a fairly young man (618/1221). His Sunnī wives were (most implausibly) accused by his vizier of having poisoned him, and they were done away with; but in principle his Sunnī policies were maintained under the nominal headship of his little son Muḥammad III.<sup>1</sup>

### *Adjustment of the doctrine*

Under Muḥammad III (618/1221–653/1255) the ṣalāt worship prescribed by the sharī'a was carried on, at least in the main centres, till the end; the community remained officially Sunnī. But gradually the sharī'a came to be little enforced, and the ideas and practices associated with the qiyāma revived. In any case, the community regarded itself as specifically Ismā'ili. Muḥammad III himself seems to have been brought up as an Ismā'ili imām. He clearly accepted that role and probably also felt himself to be dispensed from the sharī'a law and perhaps from many other human limitations. However, he was no scholar and probably contributed little personally

<sup>1</sup> On Ḥasan III, see *O.A.*, pp. 215–22. There has been some question of Ḥasan's sincerity and as to whether, if converted, he was in fact Sunnī or Twelver Shī'i; on this cf. *ibid.* pp. 222–5.

## ADJUSTMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

to Ismā'īlī thinking; indeed, he seems to have looked to a Šūfī pīr in Qazvīn for his personal spiritual guidance, or at least for some sort of blessing; he sent gifts to the pīr as an admirer. If it was not the Sunnī teachers of the sharī'a, neither was it the imām in person who guided the community spiritually. Rather, it was others, thrown up by the community itself.

Hasan III and his Sunnism were not repudiated: they were explained. In the course of this explanation the doctrine of the qiyāma was reinterpreted to allow for ordinary human and historical processes without repudiating the work of Ḥasan II either. In the process "popular" and folkloric ideas gained a still larger place over against the older learned tradition. The result was a doctrinal system in which the Ismā'ilīs were prepared to maintain their spiritual independence under almost any circumstances. Their potential affinity to a Šūfī ṭarīqa was increased, and the way was further prepared—as it turned out—for the community to survive intact even though the Ismā'īlī state itself fell.

It was explained that the qiyāma, the resurrection, was not simply a final event but a condition of life which could, in principle, be withheld or granted by the imām-qā'im to mankind, or to the élite among mankind, at any time. The tacit identification between sharī'a law and taqiyya, implied in the teaching of Ḥasan II, was confirmed, and with it the identification of ḥaqīqa (spiritual reality) with qiyāma. Human life, then, alternated between times when reality was manifest and spiritual perfection could be sought directly; and times when reality was veiled and, instead of perfection, even the élite, for the most part, were directed to an outer symbolic acting-out of the tokens of reality, as laid down in the sharī'a. Ḥasan II had introduced a brief period when reality was manifest; Ḥasan III had closed that period again.

This could be because any imām was potentially imām-qā'im, immediate representative of God on earth, and hence could decree whether there should be a time of qiyāma or not. It was still expected, as earlier among Ismā'ilīs, that full qiyama would come only at the end of the sixth millennial period after Adam: that is, at the end of the millennial period introduced by the sixth great prophet, Muḥammad, which would also be the end of the present cycle (roughly seven thousand years) of history. But within the millennial period of Muḥammad, and in special honour of his greatness, there could be anticipatory periods of qiyāma, each one a foretaste of the final period of qiyāma: such was the qiyāma of Ḥasan II. Correspondingly, the rest of the

time, when *taqiyya* and the *sharī'a* prevailed, was a time of *satr*, or "concealment".

The term *satr* had originally referred to those periods when the whereabouts of the imām was unknown to the world at large, or even, at times, to the faithful, as had been the case among Ismā'ilīs before the rise of the Fāṭimids and again after the death of Nizār. But now it came to mean not merely concealment of the person of the imām but any concealment of his ultimate reality, of his true religious role as the point where God became visible. In particular, Ḥasan III was known in his outward person as a wordly ruler, but he chose not to be recognized in his inner reality as imām; hence, despite his physical availability, his reign was a time of *satr*. Moreover, it was pointed out retrospectively that even the period when the imāms ruled in splendour in Egypt and the Ismā'ilī *bāṭin* was officially taught in Cairo had been a time of *satr*. In comparison with the *qiyāma*, all lesser degrees of the imām's manifestation were equally concealment; hence the concealment ordered by Ḥasan III differed only in degree from what had happened often before. If reality was to be hidden, it might as well be by imposition of the Sunnī *sharī'a* as by that of the *Shī'i*; and the imām might as well deny his own special relation to Muḥammad along with his status as visible locus of the divine.

*Satr*, the period of concealment, carrying with it *sharī'a* and *taqiyya*, was the more normal lot of mankind because of human weakness.<sup>1</sup> Even within the period of *satr*, spiritual reality was not entirely suppressed and could be known on a certain level. A small élite within the community of the faithful could even then look on the reality of the imām and so live the life of spiritual perfection. But, in theory the members of this élite, like the imām himself, were born to their status. In the time of Ḥasan III and perhaps even, in principle, in that of Muḥammad III, this élite may have been reduced to a single figure, the *ḥujja*, the "proof" of the imām—a position that had been filled by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and now again rose to prominence, though we cannot identify the actual individuals who filled it in this last period of the Ismā'ilī state. It sufficed for most persons to remain on the second level, the level of the *bāṭin*, understanding what lay behind the *sharī'a* and seeing the secret status of the imām, without going beyond that to the full personal realization in which they beheld nothing but the imām's ultimate reality.

<sup>1</sup> On the doctrines of the *satr*, see *OA*, pp. 225–37.

## ADJUSTMENT OF THE DOCTRINE

For most Ismā'īlīs, what was primarily retained from the qiyāma times was not so much the hope for spiritual perfection as the imaginative richness which found its fullest embodiment in the Khidr-Elijah-Melchizedec imām-qā'im figure. If the élite still existed, even in the person of a single man, then at least such secrets could still be expounded, even though they were not fully lived out by most of the faithful; their exposition was what most mattered. Under Muḥammad III, however, a way was left open for the practice of qiyāma perfection by the more spiritually minded even of ordinary persons. The faithful were divided into "strong" and "weak", and the "strong" could hope to achieve what seems to have amounted to a status of secondary or derived élite alongside the few élite who were born to their roles. Thus those who were devoted not merely to the imaginative splendour of the qiyāma but also to its moral and spiritual practice could devote themselves to this, freely transcending the sharī'a as did the imām and his ḥujja themselves.

With such a distinction, the Ismā'īlīs moved even closer to the practice of a Ṣūfī ṭarīqa, which allowed both for close disciples dedicated wholly to the pīr, and for a wider circle of adepts who looked to the pīr's wise teachings and especially to his blessing but did not attempt to enter into the pīr's spiritual life themselves. The qiyāma was losing even such social dimensions as it had still had under Muḥammad II, when it was the foundation for the life of the whole state, and was becoming, like the Ṣūfī mystical life, a special vocation for an individually selected few. Even so, the Ismā'īlī imām retained his unique cosmic position, to which a flesh-and-blood Ṣūfī pīr, himself no quṭb or Perfect Man, could not pretend.

The only religious writings which we can certainly date to the time of Muḥammad III are those ascribed to Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, who figures as the most important Ismā'īlī writer of the whole period of the satr following Ḥasan III. Legal work of his—presumably Shī'ī rather than Shāfī'ī—expounded the sharī'a for later Iranian Ismā'īlīs; his theological works expounded the spiritual situation under conditions of satr. In them he answered with sophistication the numerous problems of detailed adjustment which arose when the doctrines of the satr and of the qiyāma, and also of Fāṭimid Ismā'īlism were mutually confronted; and he dealt with the more strictly philosophical problems that arose in the new doctrine taken for itself. (He was also very careful to give as little leeway as possible to those who might wish to fancy themselves



among the "strong"—who must have been rather too numerous in fact.) We have from him a work of technical precision on Ismā'ili theology, and a briefer work clearly designed for the ordinary Ismā'ilī, yet written with a wonderfully succinct clarity. Moreover his famous work on ethics was originally dedicated to an Ismā'ili chief in Kūhistān and furnished with an Ismā'ili preface.<sup>1</sup>

Ṭūsī may not have been, even then, an Ismā'ili; later he was certainly a Twelver. But it was not entirely by chance that the Ismā'ilīs were able to make use of the services of so able a writer. From the time of Ḥasan III, at least, though especially after the Mongol holocaust, they attracted to their libraries and to their learned patronage a large number of scholars like him, if not quite so eminent, from the outer world. Such scholars were free to maintain their prior religious convictions, and though Ṭūsī and some of the other non-Ismā'ili scholars who were in Rūdbār at the time of the Mongol invasion claimed that they were being kept there by force, it seems unlikely that such force long antedated the Mongol invasion itself, when special measures must have been unavoidable. At any rate, they were on terms of mutual confidence with the Ismā'ili leadership. The Ismā'ilīs of the satr had worked out a religious system which allowed the most extreme spiritual daring of their heritage to coexist with a folkloric *Shī'ī* imaginativeness and even with the religious scholarship of the wider Muslim world. In such an atmosphere, their out-of-the-way fortresses were becoming centres of an intellectual life no longer limited to their own particular tradition; perhaps more important, the Nizārī Ismā'ili tradition itself was ceasing to be necessarily dependent upon the Ismā'ili state as such.

### *Persisting ambitions*

As in religion, so in political action the Ismā'ilīs developed a flexible policy, one which allowed for co-operation with the Sunnī powers without abandonment of Ismā'ili solidarity or even of Ismā'ili ambitions. In this sphere also Muḥammad III was not the central figure, though he played his role. In his first years he was a minor, having become imām at the age of nine, and the chiefs of the community acted with little reference to him—and without leaving much trace of quarreling among themselves. When he grew up he seems to have been moody and capable of violent fits of anger; he could be drunk for

<sup>1</sup> On Ṭūsī's Ismā'ili work, see *O.A.*, pp. 239-43.

days at a time. The chroniclers have accused him of being mentally deranged, and say that his courtiers were afraid to bring unpleasant news to him; but in fact he seems to have kept pretty well in touch with events and was probably less brutal and unpredictable than many another tyrant born to absolute power. Nevertheless, though he maintained his authority effectively enough, most of the initiative in practical decisions probably came from others.<sup>1</sup>

Muḥammad III's reign began (618/1221) just after the first wave of the Mongol conquest had destroyed the Khwārazmian power. The scholarly refugees came to the Ismā'īlī towns at this time, not simply because they were out of the way and so ignored by the Mongols, but because at that point the Ismā'īlī state was proving stronger than most. The prudently early submission to the Mongols, which gave it an initial immunity, did not preclude an independent policy. In Kūhistān the Ismā'īlīs maintained an island of prosperity and stability from which all benefited when in so many other places even what the Mongols had spared was being disrupted by the lesser warrings they left in their wake. The scholarly gentleman Shihāb al-Dīn, a ruler whom even bigoted Sunnīs spoke highly of, aroused complaints that his policy of wholesale hospitality was lavishing too freely the resources of the community upon non-Ismā'īlī strangers, and he was eventually replaced. But Shams al-Dīn, the replacement, sent from Alamūt, also compelled respect among the Sunnīs. After an attempt on his life by a Sunnī foreigner, he was able to prevent a spontaneous lynching of all the resident Sunnīs, taking soldierly command of a mob situation and drastically enforcing order. The Kūhistānīs were able to take a forward policy in Sistān, but by and large they limited their objectives to defence. Sunnīs whose style of life had been interrupted by the Mongols could go to Kūhistān to renew their wardrobes, and the main burden of negotiations between the Ismā'īlīs and their neighbours seems to have been the reopening of trade.

In Rūdbār the Ismā'īlī policy was more aggressive, though in one sense it likewise was on the side of order, being favourable to the caliph and opposed to Khwārazmian disruption. In the first six years after the fall of the Khwārazmian empire, the Ismā'īlīs annexed a number of places, including Dāmghān near Gird-Kūh. At some point, perhaps earlier but most probably in this period, they seized other places in Qūmis, presumably in the Zagros mountains, and in the Ṭārum

<sup>1</sup> On the personality of Muḥammad III, see *OA*, pp. 256-8.

mountains of western Dailam where once they had had little foothold. The arrival of the Khwārazmian adventurer Jalāl al-Dīn put an end to this expansion. The old Ismā'īlī quarrel with the Khwārazmians was renewed with him. A Khwārazmian chief who had raided Ismā'īlī Kūhistān was assassinated, and Jalāl al-Dīn's vizier was secretly surrounded by Ismā'īlīs in his service, ready to cut him down at a word from the imām (these latter were burned alive when their presence was revealed—and Alamūt was duly compensated financially for their deaths). Before long the Ismā'īlīs agreed to pay Jalāl al-Dīn tribute for Dāmghān; but they continued to co-operate with both the caliph and the Mongols in opposition to him. The heirs to power in both Āzarbāijān and 'Irāq-i 'Ajam whom he had dispossessed took refuge in Rūdbār and received Ismā'īlī help.

After the death of Jalāl al-Dīn in 628/1231, the Ismā'īlī began to shift their hostilities once more: from the Saljuqs they had shifted their enmity to the Khwārazmians, who were the Saljuqs' most powerful successors; from the Khwārazmians they shifted it now to the Mongols. The Mongols took Dāmghān from them, the only major (and Sunnī) city that they then had a garrison in. The breach with the Mongols became decisive only after more than a decade, when the Mongols refused to recognize the Ismā'īlī envoys in Mongolia. The breach may have been exacerbated by the attitude of Muḥammad III, who eventually, at least, proved much more insistent than most Ismā'īlī leaders in resisting the Mongols. But it was made inevitable by an outlook which was popular with the Ismā'īlīs quite independently of the imām's attitude. The Ismā'īlīs continued, as before, to be involved in neighbouring quarrels: again supporting a chief of Rūyān against his overlord in Māzandarān, for instance. But in the open political situation that the first Mongol operations had left behind, they were envisaging a field of action wider than had been possible since the time of Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ.

Soon after the death of Ḥasan III, Ismā'īlī agitators were already at work in Ray, evidently looking toward winning a new popular following and perhaps arousing a new general revolt. Syrian Ismā'īlīs, on a rumour of Jalāl al-Dīn's death, boasted to the ruler of Anatolia that the Ismā'īlīs of Rūdbār would now take over all 'Irāq-i 'Ajam, whose previous Khwārazmian ruler was a refugee among them. Prophecies of how the imām was going to conquer the world had long appeared in Ismā'īlī works, but we find an unusually detailed prophecy in one of

Ṭūsī's works of this period. After occupying Dailam, the imām would conquer the several other districts south of the Caspian—Māzandarān, Gilān, and Mūghān—and would then carry the holy war to India, China, and Europe—that is, to all the main civilized regions, beyond the Islamic lands in the eastern hemisphere. At this juncture, all this need not have seemed too fantastic. The nearest we know of Ismā'īlīs getting to China is by way of embassies in Mongolia. But Indian tradition places the first Nizārī Ismā'īlī missionary activity, which produced the Khoja sect there, at just this time. And the Ismā'īlīs are reported to have sent envoys in 1238 to the courts of France and England in Western Europe to try to arrange for joint action by Christians and Muslims against the Mongols: a project which would presuppose the Ismā'īlīs still having some common understanding with the caliph, even that late in Muḥammad III's reign. Popular fantasy—presumably not discouraged by the Ismā'īlīs—represented many of the rulers of the earth as sending regular ransom payments to the Ismā'īlīs, at least to those in Syria, to avoid being assassinated; kings were named as distant as the Yemen and Germany and Spain. But pretensions to any sort of world domination could only conflict irreconcilably with the overriding ambitions of the Mongols, who regarded themselves as the only masters of the world.<sup>1</sup>

### *The collapse*

The Ismā'īlīs were playing a larger role in the outer world after the first Mongol conquests than they had played since the original revolt, and their political structure, like their intellectual life, seems to have been vigorous and sound. Nevertheless, they had not ceased to be a marginal power in territory and manpower. Though the Būyid family had once dominated all western Iran on the basis of the loyalty of Dailam and of its peasant soldiery, the times called for more than the stop-gap regime which the Būyids had been able to supply. To be successful, the Ismā'īlīs would have to depend on the Shī'īs of the Islamic lands; but the Shī'a was still at a low ebb then, and most Shī'īs had rejected the Ismā'īlī imāms anyway; nor was Alamūt in a position to come to an arrangement with Twelver Shī'ism such as Shāh Ismā'il could later make to found the Ṣafavid state on. In any case, many of the Ismā'īlīs were more concerned to avoid hindrances to

<sup>1</sup> On politics under Muḥammad III, see *O.A.*, pp. 244-8, 250-6.

commerce than to conquer the world. The Mongols, on the contrary, were fully serious about their intention to rule everywhere and to suppress every possible rival.

With time, the Mongols consolidated their position in Iran, and the Ismā'ilīs—who, apart from the caliph himself, were almost alone in remaining hostile—became isolated. The welcome accorded Ḥasan III as a convert had long since been dissipated, and most Sunnīs were again eager to see the old enemies of orthodoxy suppressed. At last Möngke, urged on by Muslims at his court, decided in 650/1252 to send a major expedition against the two powers that still held out in the central Muslim lands: the Ismā'ilīs and the 'Abbāsīd caliphate. Hülegü took his time in making the long trip from Mongolia with the main Mongol force, but his advance armies joined with the Mongol garrisons already in Iran to attack as many Ismā'ilī fortresses as possible. In Dailam they did little more than raid. They failed to take Gird-Kūh; it seemed impregnable until disease decimated the garrison, and in that emergency men from Rūdbār were successfully thrown in to bring the garrison up to strength: on which the Mongols gave up. They managed to take Tūn and some other places in Kūhistān, on which they then concentrated; but later the Ismā'ilīs regained what had been lost even there. When Hülegü finally arrived, however, the Mongols more successfully overran a great part of Kūhistān, destroying Tūn and deporting its artisans according to their custom. Then Hülegü moved toward Rūdbār.

This situation seems to have aggravated a tension between Muḥammad III and his chief officers, who wanted to come to an agreement with the Mongols. It was said, perhaps for political reasons later, that after the Mongol armies approached, Muḥammad's mental aberration became more marked, so that the leading Ismā'ilīs feared for their lives. Muḥammad's son and designated successor as imām, Khur-Shāh, had long been on bad terms with his father (it is said the Ismā'ilīs, holding to their principles, would not let Muḥammad designate any other son, though he wished to). Now Khur-Shāh likewise began to be frightened. He came to an agreement with the Ismā'ilī chief men that Muḥammad was to be set aside without suffering any harm to his person, and Khur-Shāh, as effective regent, was then to negotiate with the Mongols. But before the plan could be put into operation, Khur-Shāh fell ill and was confined to his bed. At this point (653/1255), a favourite of Muḥammad's, whom Muḥammad had injured, murdered him.

Khur-Shāh and his advisers set about a change of policy with due

caution. First they completed a campaign in western Dailam, where the Ismā'īlis seized a fortress they had been besieging. Then Khur-Shāh sent letters to the neighbouring rulers announcing his father's death and his own accession. At the same time he ordered all the Ismā'īlis to follow the shari'a more closely than they had generally been doing, clearly hoping to conciliate the Sunnī powers again. Then he sent to the Mongols, offering his submission.

Unfortunately, the Mongols were not ready to be satisfied with anything less than total surrender. They required Khur-Shāh's personal attendance on Hülegü and the demolition of the Ismā'īlī fortresses, including Alamūt. Khur-Shāh asked for a delay of a year in his own appearance and for exemption of Alamūt and Lanbasar from the demolition order. Meanwhile the chiefs in Gird-Kūh and in Kūhistān submitted personally, but the fortress nonetheless held out. Khur-Shāh was finally permitted to send his son in his place, but the seven-year-old lad was sent back as being too young. By this time, Hülegü himself was near Ray and speeding his pace as he moved nearer Rūdbār; he demanded that Khur-Shāh demolish immediately at least Maimūn-Diz, the fortress where he was staying, and then come himself to Rūdbār. Khur-Shāh still lingered, and suddenly found himself besieged in Maimūn-Diz by the full Mongol force.

There is some evidence that, given the spirit of an earlier time, the key Ismā'īlī fortress might have been held at least long enough to persuade Hülegü that some accommodation, leaving the Ismā'īlī power humbled but still essentially intact, would be expeditious. The Mongols themselves were doubtful whether they should press the siege of Maimūn-Diz at that time; subsequently, when they found how massively constructed and well-provisioned were such fortresses as Alamūt, they congratulated themselves on their good fortune in persuading their master to surrender them. Muḥammad III may have been correct in his calculation that the Ismā'īlis could resist the Mongols as well as they had the Saljuqs or the Khwārazmians. Indeed, the Ismā'īlī spirit was not wholly gone. No traitors are recorded, and at least Gird-Kūh, which later elected to resist despite Khur-Shāh's final surrender, held out alone for a long time. But Khur-Shāh seems to have listened to the foreign scholars at the court, such as Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, who were eager to see the Ismā'īlī state at an end, and to be free to taste of the yet larger munificence of the Mongols (which they did); nor did his Ismā'īlī advisers strongly counteract that influence, though the lesser fidā'is

threatened to kill him if he tried to surrender. Before long, Khur-Shāh came down to Hülegü's camp, and the greater number of the Ismā'ilīs followed his lead (654/1256). A devoted band which yet attacked the Mongols as they entered Maimūn-Diz was exterminated, and with some trouble most of the fortresses were persuaded by Khur-Shāh, now a puppet of the Mongols, to surrender. The Mongols, who could not expect to hold them themselves in a hostile Dailam, undertook the major labour of dismantling them stone by stone.

Gird-Kūh and Lanbasar still held out for a time, but isolated they could no longer hope for such succour as had come earlier to Gird-Kūh from Rūdbār; after some years they too had to surrender.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the Sunnī Muslims persuaded the Mongols to destroy the whole Ismā'ilī people so far as they could. The library of Alamūt was burned as a matter of course (though Juvainī, a Sunnī scholar, was first allowed to take out copies of the Qur'ān and other "safe" items). Rather less expected was a general massacre of all the Ismā'ilīs who, exiled from their fortresses, were relatively accessible to the Mongol sword. The men of Kūhistān were summoned to great gatherings—presumably on the pretext of consultation—and slaughtered. The slave markets of Khurāsān were glutted with Ismā'ilī women and children, denied the privileges of Muslims. Khur-Shāh was sent to Mongolia but was rejected by Möngke and killed on the way back;<sup>2</sup> however, the remnant of the Ismā'ilīs claimed to have saved and hidden away his son to father a continuing line of imāms.<sup>3</sup>

In the next decades there were attempts in both Rūdbār and Kūhistān to restore the Ismā'ilī state, but without success. The Syrian Ismā'ilīs, situated at the farthest limit of the Mongol tide, barely managed to survive it, only to become dependent on the Mamlūk state, whose ruler they were bound to furnish with assassins on demand. In Iran, the surviving Ismā'ilīs at last took refuge in obscurity, cloaked by the forms of a Ṣūfī ṭarīqa whose pīr was the imām.

<sup>1</sup> Gird-Kūh did not in fact surrender until 29 Rabī' II 669/15 December 1270. See Rashīd al-Dīn, ed. Alizade, p. 140, also above, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently in the Khangai mountains. See Juvainī, tr. Boyle, p. 724 n. 8. also above, p. 345.

<sup>3</sup> On the Mongol operations, see *O.A.*, pp. 258–71. The basic references are Juvainī and Rashīd al-Dīn; each of these must be consulted at two points: when he describes the expedition of Hülegü, and then also when he describes the history of the Ismā'ilīs, under the reign of Khur-Shāh.